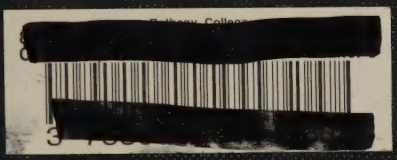

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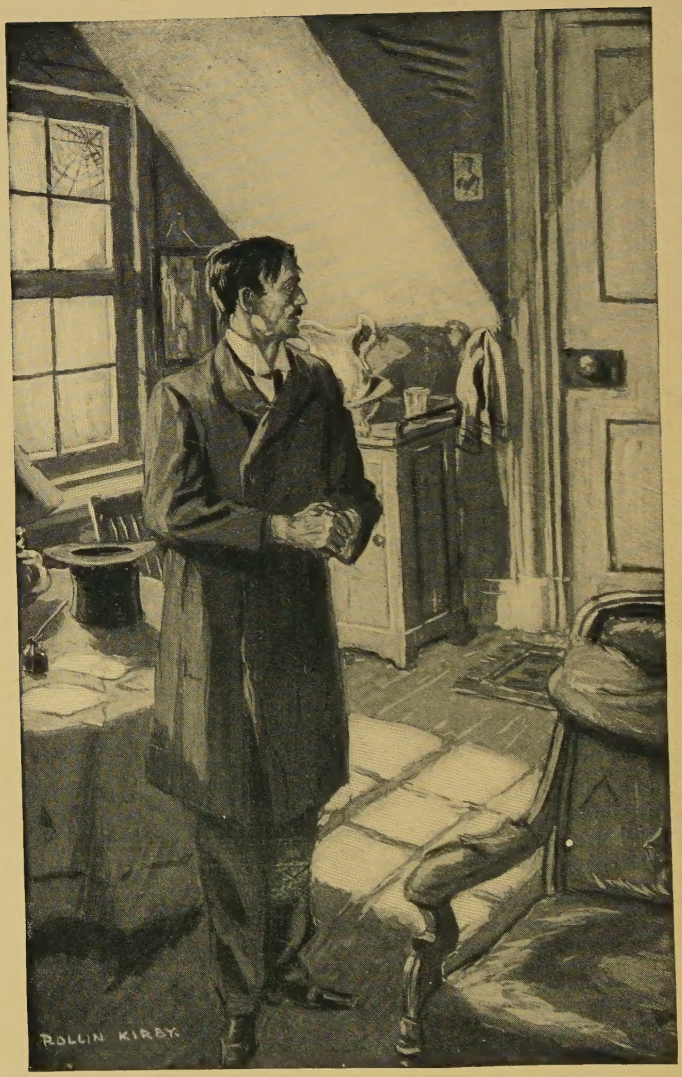

BUT THE FOOTSTEPS ECHOED AND DIED AWAY.

—A Cigarette Maker's Romance.

THE NOVELS OF
F. MARION CRAWFORD

In Twenty-five Volumes — Authorized Edition

A Cigarette-Maker's Romance

Khaled

A Tale of Arabia

BY

F. MARION CRAWFORD

WITH FRONTISPIECE

P. F. COLLIER & SON
NEW YORK

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A CIGARETTE-MAKER'S ROMANCE

CHAPTER I

The inner room of a tobacconist's shop is not perhaps the spot which a writer of fiction would naturally choose as the theatre of his play, nor does the inventor of pleasant romances, of stirring incident, or moving love-tales, feel himself instinctively inclined to turn to Munich as to the city of his dreams. On the other hand, it is by no means certain that, if the choice of a stage for our performance were offered to the most contented among us, we should be satisfied to speak our parts and go through our actor's business upon the boards of this world. Some would prefer to take their properties, their player's crowns and robes, their aspiring expressions and their finely expressed aspirations before the audience of a larger planet; others, perhaps the majority, would choose, with more humility as well as with more common sense, the shadowy scenery, the softer footlights and the less exigent public of a modest asteroid, beyond the reach of our earthly haste, of our noisy and unclean high-roads to honour, of our furious chariot races round the goals of fame, and, especially, beyond the reach of competition. But we have no choice. We are in the world and, before we know

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where we are, we are on one of the paths which we must traverse in our few score years between birth and death. Moreover, each man's path leads up to the theatre on the one side, and down from it on the other. The inexorable manager, Fate, requires that each should go through with his comedy or his drama, if he be judged worthy of a leading part, with his scene or his act in another man's piece, if he be fit only to play the walking gentleman, the dumb footman, or the mechanically trained supernumerary who does duty by turns as soldier, sailor, courtier, husbandman, conspirator or red-capped patriot. A few play well, many play badly, all must appear, and the majority are feebly applauded and loudly hissed. He counts himself great who is received with such an uproar of clapping and shout of approval as may drown the voice of the discontented; he is called fortunate who, having missed his cue and broken down in his words, makes his exit in the triumphant train of the greater actor upon whom all eyes are turned; he is deemed happy who, having offended no man, is allowed to depart in peace upon his downward road. Yet none of these players need pride themselves much upon their success nor take to heart their failure. Long before most of them have slipped into the grave which waits at the foot of the hill, and have been wrapped comfortably in the pleasant earth, their names are forgotten by those who screamed with pleasure or hooted in disgust at their performance, their faces are no longer remembered, their great drama is become an old-fashioned mummery of the past. Why

should they care? Their work is done, they have been rewarded or punished, paid with praise and gold or mulcted in the sum of their reputation and estate. Famous or infamous, in honour or in disrepute, in riches or in poverty, they have reached the end of their time, they are worn out, the world will have no more of them, they are worthless in the price-scale of men, they must be buried out of sight and they will be forgotten out of mind. The beginning is the same for all, and the end also, and as for the future, who shall tell us upon what basis of higher intelligence our brief passage across the stage is to be judged? Why then should the present trouble our vanity so greatly? And if our play is of so little importance, why should we care whether the scenery is romantic instead of commonplace, or why should we make furious efforts to shift a Gothic castle, a drawbridge, a moat and a waterfall into the slides occupied by the four walls of a Munich tobacconist's shop?

There is not even anything especial in the appearance of the place to recommend it to the ready pen of the word-painter. It is an establishment of very modest pretensions situated in one of the side streets leading to a great thoroughfare. As we are in Munich, however, the side street is broad and clean, the pavement is well swept and the adjoining houses have an air of solid respectability and wealth. At the point where the street widens to an irregular shape on the downward slope there is a neat little iron kiosque completely covered with brilliant advertisements, printed in black

Gothic letters upon red and yellow paper. The point of vivid colour is not disagreeable, for it relieves the neutral tints of brick and brown stone, and arrests the eye, long wearied with the respectable parade of buildings. The tobacconist's shop is, indeed, the most shabby, or, to speak more correctly, the least smartly new among its fellow-shops, wherein dwell, in consecutive order, a barber, a watchmaker, a pastry-cook, a shoemaker and a colourman. In spite of its unattractive exterior, however, the establishment of "Christian Fischelowitz, from South Russia," enjoys a very considerable reputation. Within the high, narrow shop, there is good store of rare tobaccos, from the mild Kir to the Imperial Samson, the aromatic Dubec and the pungent Swary. The dusty window beside the narrow door exhibits, it is true, only a couple of tall, dried tobacco plants set in flower-pots, a carelessly arranged collection of cedar and pasteboard boxes for cigars and cigarettes, and a fantastically constructed Swiss cottage, built entirely of cigarettes and fine cut yellow leaf, with little pieces of glass set in for windows. This effort of architecture is in a decidedly ruinous condition, the little stuffed paper cylinders are ragged and torn, some of them show signs of detaching themselves from the cardboard frame upon which they are pasted, and the dust of years has accumulated upon the bit of painted board which serves as a foundation for the chalet. In one corner of the window an object more gaudy but not more useful attracts the eye. It is the popular doll figure commonly known in Germany as the "Wiener

Gigerl" or "Vienna fop." It is doubtful whether any person could appear in the public places of Vienna in such a costume without being stoned or otherwise painfully put to a shameful death. The doll is arrayed in black shorts and silk stockings, a wide white waistcoat, a scarlet evening coat, an enormous collar and a white tall hat with a broad brim. He stands upon one foot, raising the other as though in the act of beginning a minuet; he holds in one hand a stick and in the other a cigarette, a relatively monstrous eyeglass magnifies one of his painted eyes, and upon his face is such an expression of combined insolence, vulgarity, dishonesty and conceit as would insure his being shot at sight in any Western American village making the least pretence to self-respect. On high days and holidays Christian Fischelowitz inserts a key into the square black pedestal whereon the doll has its being, and the thing lives and moves, turns about and cocks its impertinent head at the passers-by, while a feeble tune of uncertain rhythm is heard grating itself out upon the teeth of the metal comb in the concealed mechanism. Fischelowitz delights in this monstrosity, and is never weary of watching its detestable antics. It is doubtful whether in the simplicity of his good-natured heart he does not really believe that the Wiener Gigerl may attract a stray customer to his counter and, in the long-run, pay for itself. For it cost him money, and in itself, as a thing of beauty, it hardly covers the bad debt contracted with him by a poor fellow-countryman to whom he kindly lent fifty

marks last year. He accepted the doll without a murmur, however, in full discharge of the obligation, and, with an odd philosophy peculiar to himself, he does his best to get what amusement he can out of the little red-coated figure without complaining and without bitterness.

Christian's wife, his larger if not his better half, is less complacent. In the publicity of the shop her small black eyes cast glances full of hate upon the innocent Gigerl, her full flat face reddens with anger when she remembers the money, and her fat hands would dash the insolent little figure into the street, if her mercantile understanding did not suggest the possibility of ultimately selling it for something. In view of such a fortunate contingency, and whenever she is alone, she carefully dusts the thing and puts it away in the cupboard in the corner, well knowing that Fischelowitz will return in an hour, will take it out, set it in its place, wind it up and watch its performance with his everlasting, good-humoured, satisfied smile. In public she ventures only to abuse the doll. In the silent watches of the night she directs her sharp speeches at Christian himself. Not that she is altogether miserly, nor by any means an ill-disposed person. Had she been of such a disposition her husband would not have married her, for he is a very good man of business and a keen judge of other wares besides tobacco. She is a good mother and a good housewife, energetic, thrifty, and of fairly even temper; but that particular piece of generosity which resulted in the

acquisition of a red-coated puppet in exchange for fifty marks fills her heart with anger and her plump brown fingers with an itching desire to scratch and tear something or somebody as a means of satisfying her vengeance. For the poor fellow-countryman was one of the Count's friends, and Akulina Fischelowitz abhors the Count and loathes him, and the Wiener Gigerl was the beginning of the end.

While Christian is watching his doll, and Akulina is seated behind the counter, her hands folded upon her lap, and her eyes darting unquiet glances at her husband, the Count is busily occupied in making cigarettes in the dingy back shop among a group of persons, both young and old, all similarly occupied. It is not to be expected that the workroom should be cleaner or more tastefully decorated than the counting-house, and in such a business as the manufacture of cigarettes by hand, litter of all sorts accumulates rapidly. The "Famous Cigarette Manufactory of Christian Fischelowitz, from South Russia" is about as dingy, as unhealthy, as untidy, as dusty a place as can be found within the limits of tidy, well-to-do Munich. The room is lighted by a window and a half-glazed door, both opening upon a dark court. The walls, originally whitewashed, are of a deep rich brown, attributable partly to the constant fumes and exhalations of tobacco, partly to the fine brown dust of the dried refuse cuttings, and partly to the admirable smoke-giving qualities of the rickety iron stove which stands in one corner, and in which a fire is daily

attempted during more than half the year. There are many shelves upon the walls too, and the white wood of these has also received into itself the warm, deep colour. Upon two of these shelves there are accumulations of useless articles, a cracked glass vase, once the pride of the show window, when it was filled to overflowing with fine cut leaf, a broken-down samovar which has seen tea-service in many cities, from Kiew to Moscow, from Moscow to Vilna, from Vilna to Berlin, from Berlin to Munich; there are fragments of Russian lacquered wooden bowls, wrecked cigar-boxes, piles of dingy handbills left over from the last half-yearly advertisement, a crazy Turkish narghile, the broken stem of a chibouque, an old hat and an odd boot, besides irregularly shaped parcels, wrapped in crumpled brown paper and half buried in dust. Upon the other shelves are arranged more neatly rows of tin boxes with locks, and reams of still uncut cigarette paper, some white, some straw-coloured.

Round about the room are the seats of the workers. One man alone is standing at his task, a man with a dark, Cossack face, high cheek-bones, honest, gleaming black eyes, straggling hair and ragged beard. In his shirt-sleeves, his arms bare to the elbow, he handles the heavy swivel knife, pressing the package of carefully arranged leaves forward and under the blade by almost imperceptible degrees. It is one of the most delicate operations in the art, and the man has an especial gift for the work. So sensitive is his strong right hand that as the knife cuts through the thick

pile he can detect the presence of a scrap of thin paper amongst the tobacco, and not a bit of hardened stem or a twisted leaf escapes him. It is very hard work, even for a strong man, and the moisture stands in great drops on his dark forehead as he carefully presses the sharp instrument through the resisting substance, quickly lifts it up again and pushes on the package for the next cut.

At a small black table near by sits a Polish girl, poorly dressed, her heavy red-brown hair braided in one long neat tress, her face deadly white, her blue eyes lustreless and sunken, her thin fingers actively rolling bits of paper round a glass tube, drawing them off as the edges are gummed together, and laying them in a prettily arranged pile before her. She is Vjera, the shell-maker, invariably spoken of as "poor Vjera." Vjera, being interpreted from the Russian, means "Faith." There is an odd and pathetic irony in the name borne by the sickly girl. Faith—faith in what? In shell-making? In Christian Fischelowitz? In Johann Schmidt, the Cossack tobacco-cutter, whose real name is lost in the gloom of many dim wanderings? In life? In death? Who knows? In God, at least, poor child—and in her wretched existence there is little else left for her to believe in. If you ask her whether she believes in the Count, she will turn away rather hastily, but in that case the wish to believe is there.

Beside Vjera sits another girl, less pale perhaps, but more insignificant in feature, and similarly occupied,

with this slight difference that the little cylinders she makes are straw-coloured when Vjera is making white ones, and white when her companion is using straw-coloured paper. On the opposite side of the room, also before small black tables, sit two men, to wit, Victor Ivanowitch Dumnoff and the Count. It is their business to shape the tobacco and to insert it into the shells, a process performed by rolling the cut leaf into a cylinder in a tongue-shaped piece of parchment, which, when ready, has the form of a pencil, and is slipped into the shell. The parchment is then withdrawn, and the tobacco remains behind in its place; the little bunch of threads which protrudes at each end is cut off with sharp scissors and the cigarette is finished.

The Count, on the afternoon of the day on which this story opens, was sitting before his little black table in his usual attitude, his head stooping slightly forward, his elbows supported on each side of him, his long fingers moving quickly and skilfully, his greyish blue eyes fixed intently on his work. At five o'clock in the afternoon on Tuesday, the sixth of May, in the present year of grace one thousand eight hundred and ninety, the Count was rapidly approaching the two-thousandth cigarette of that day's work. Two thousand in a day was his limit; and though he boasted that he could make three thousand between dawn and midnight, if absolutely necessary, yet he confessed that among the last five hundred a few might be found in which the leaves would be too tightly rolled or too loosely packed. Up to his limit, however, he was to

be relied upon, and not one of his hundred score of cigarettes would be found to differ in weight from another by a single grain.

It is perhaps time to describe the outward appearance of the busy worker, out of whose life the events of some six-and-thirty hours furnish the subject of this little tale. The Count is thirty years old, but might be thought older, for there are grey streaks in his smooth black hair, and there is a grey tone in the complexion of his tired face. In figure he is thin, broad shouldered, sinewy, well made and graceful. He moves easily and with a certain elegance. His arms and legs are long in proportion to his body. His head is well shaped, bony, full of energy—his nose is finely modelled and sharply aquiline; a short dark moustache does not quite hide the firm, well-chiselled lips, and the clean-cut chin is prominent and of the martial type. From under his rather heavy eyebrows a pair of keen eyes, full of changing light and expression, look somewhat contemptuously on the world and its inhabitants. On the whole, the Count is a handsome man and looks a gentleman, in spite of his occupation and in spite of his clothes, which are in the fashion of twenty years ago, but are carefully brushed and all but spotless. There are poor men who can wear a coat, as a red Indian will ride a mustang which a white man has left for dead, beyond the period predetermined by the nature of tailoring as the natural term of existence allotted to earthly garments. We look upon a centenarian as a miracle of

longevity, and he is careful to tell us his age if he have not lost the power of speech; but if the coats of poor men could speak, how much more marvellous in our eyes would their powers of life appear! A stranger would have taken the Count for a half-pay officer of good birth in straitened circumstances. The expression of his face at the time in question was grave and thoughtful, as though he were thinking of matters weightier to his happiness, if not more necessary to his material welfare than his work. He saw his fingers moving, he watched each honey-coloured bundle of cut leaf as it was rolled in the parchment tongue, and with unswerving regularity he made the motions required to slip the tobacco into the shell. But, while seeing all that he did, and seeing consciously, he looked as though he saw also through the familiar materials shaped under his fingers, into a dim distance full of a larger life and wider interests.

The five occupants of the workshop had been working in silence for nearly half an hour. The two girls on the one side and the two men on the other kept their eyes bent down upon their fingers, while Johann Schmidt, the Cossack, plied his guillotine-like knife in the corner. This same Johann Schmidt, whose real name, to judge from his appearance, might have been Tarass Bulba or Danjelo Buralbash, and was probably of a similar sound, was at once the wit, the spendthrift and the humanitarian of the Fischelowitz manufactory, possessing a number of good qualities in such abundant measure as to make him a total failure in everything

except the cutting of tobacco. Like many witty, generous and kind-hearted persons in a much higher rank of existence, he was cursed with a total want of tact. On the present occasion, having sliced through an unusually long package of leaves and having encountered an exceptional number of obstacles in doing so, he thought fit to pause, draw a long breath and wipe the perspiration from his sallow forehead with a pocket-handkerchief in which the neutral tints predominated. This operation, preparatory to a rest of ten minutes, having been successfully accomplished, Tarass Bulba Schmidt picked up a tiny oblong bit of paper which had found its way to his feet from one of the girls' tables, took a pinch of the freshly cut tobacco beside him and rolled a cigarette in his palm with one hand while he felt in his pocket for a match with the other. Then, in the midst of a great cloud of fragrant smoke, he sat down upon the edge of his cutting-block and looked at his companions. After a few moments of deep thought he gave expression to his meditations in bad German. It is curious to see how readily the Slavs in Germany fall into the habit of using the language of the country when conversing together.

"It is my opinion," he said at last, "that the most objectless existences are those which most exactly accomplish the object set before them."

Having given vent to this bit of paradox, Johann inhaled as much smoke as his leathery lungs could contain and relapsed into silence. Vjera, the Polish girl, glanced at the tobacco-cutter and went on with

her work. The insignificant girl beside her giggled vacantly. Dumnoff did not seem to have heard the remark.

"Nineteen hundred and twenty-three," muttered the Count between his teeth and in Russian, as the nineteen hundred and twenty-third cigarette rolled from his fingers, and he took up the parchment tongue for the nineteen hundred and twenty-fourth time that day.

"I do not exactly understand you, Herr Schmidt," said Vjera without looking up again. "An objectless life has no object. How then—"

"There is nothing to understand," growled Dumnoff, who never counted his own work, and always enjoyed a bit of conversation, provided he could abuse something or somebody. "There is nothing in it, and Herr Schmidt is a Landau moss-head."

It would be curious to ascertain why the wiseacres of eastern Bavaria are held throughout South Germany in such contempt as to be a byword for dulness and stupidity. The Cossack's dark eyes shot a quick glance at the Russian, but he took no notice of the remark.

"I mean," he said, after a pause, "exactly what I say. I am an honest fellow, and I always mean what I say, and no offence to anybody. Do we not all of us, here with Fischelowitz exactly fulfil the object set before us, I would like to ask? Do we not make cigarettes from morning till night with horrible exactness and regularity? Very well. Do we not, at the same time, lead an atrociously objectless existence?"

"The object of existence is to live," remarked Dumnoff, who was fond of cabbage and strong spirits, and of little else in the world. The Cossack laughed.

"Do you call this living?" he asked contemptuously. Then the good-humoured tone returned to his voice, and he shrugged his bony shoulders as he crossed one leg over the other and took another puff.

"Nineteen hundred and twenty-nine," said the Count.

"Do you call that a life for a Christian man?" asked Schmidt again, looking at him and waving towards him the lighted cigarette he held. "Is that a life for a gentleman, for a real Count, for a noble, for an educated aristocrat, for a man born to be the heir of millions?"

"Thirty," said the Count. "No, it is not. But there is no reason why you should remind us of the fact, that I know of. It is bad enough to be obliged to do the thing, without being made to talk about it. Not that it matters to me so much to-day as it did a year ago, as you may imagine. Thirty-one. It will soon be over for me, at least. In fact I only finish these two thousand out of kindness to Fischelowitz, because I know he has a large order to deliver on the day after to-morrow. And, besides, a gentleman must keep his word even—thirty-two—in the matter of making cigarettes for other people. But the work on this batch shall be a parting gift of my goodwill to Fischelowitz, who is an honest fellow and has understood my painful situation all along. To-morrow at this time I shall be far away. Thirty-three."

The Count drew a long breath of relief in the anticipation of his release from captivity and hard labour. Vjera dropped her glass tube and her little pieces of paper and looked sadly at him, while he was speaking.

"By the by," observed the Cossack, "to-day is Tuesday. I had quite forgotten. So you really leave us to-morrow."

"Yes. It is all settled at last, and I have had letters. It is to-morrow—and this is my last hundred."

"At what time?" inquired Dumnoff, with a rough laugh. "Is it to be in the morning or in the afternoon?"

"I do not know," answered the Count, quietly and with an air of conviction. "It will certainly be before night."

"Provided you get the news in time to ask us to the feast," jeered the other, "we shall all be as happy as you yourself."

"Thirty-four," said the Count, who had rolled the last cigarette very slowly and thoughtfully.

Vjera cast an imploring look on Dumnoff, as though beseeching him not to continue his jesting. The rough man, who might have sat for the type of the Russian mujik, noticed the glance and was silent.

"Who is incredulous enough to disbelieve this time?" asked the Cossack, gravely. "Besides, the Count says that he has had letters; so it is certain, at last."

"Love-letters, he means," giggled the insignificant girl, who rejoiced in the name of Anna Schmigjelskova, Then she looked at Vjera as though afraid of her displeasure.

But Vjera took no notice of the silly speech and sat idle for some minutes, gazing at the Count with an expression in which love, admiration and pity were very oddly mingled. Pale and ill as she looked, there was a ray of light and a movement of life in her face during those few moments. Then she took again her glass tube and her bits of paper and resumed her task of making shells, with a little heave of her thin chest that betrayed the suppression of a sigh.

The Count finished his second thousand, and arranged the last hundreds neatly with the others, laying them in little heaps and patting the ends with his fingers so that they should present an absolutely symmetrical appearance. Dumnoff plodded on, in his peculiar way, doing the work well and then carelessly tossing it into a basket by his side. He was capable of working fourteen hours at a stretch when there was a prospect of cabbage soup and liquor in the evening. The Cossack cleaned his cutting-block and his broad swivel knife and emptied the cut tobacco into a clean tin box. It was clear that the day's work was almost at an end for all present. At that moment Fischelowitz entered with jaunty step and smiling face, jingling a quantity of loose silver in his hand. He is a little man, rotund and cheerful, quiet of speech and sunny in manner, with a brown beard and waving dark hair, arranged in the manner dear to barbers' apprentices. He has very soft brown eyes, a healthy complexion and a nose the inverse of aquiline, for it curves upwards to its sharp point, as though perpetually snuffing

after the pleasant fragrance of his favorite "Dubec otborny."

"Well, my children," he said, with a slight stammer that somehow lent an additional kindliness to his tone, "what has the day's work been? You first, Herr Graf," he added, turning to the Count. "I suppose that you have made a thousand at least?"

Fischelowitz possessed in abundance the tact which was lacking in Johann Schmidt, the Cossack. He well knew that the Count had made double the quantity, but he also knew that the latter enjoyed the small triumph of producing twice what seemed to be expected of him.

"Two thousand, Herr Fischelowitz," he said, proudly. Then seeing that his employer was counting out the sum of six marks, he made a deprecating gesture, as though refusing all payment.

"No," he said, with great dignity, and rising from his seat. "No. You must allow me, on this occasion, to refuse the honorarium usual under the circumstances."

"And why, my dear Count?" inquired Fischelowitz, shaking the six marks in one hand and the remainder of his money in the other, as though weighing the silver. "And why will you refuse me the honor——"

The other working people exchanged glances of amusement, as though they knew what was coming. Vjera hid her face in her hands as she rested her elbows on the table before her.

"I must indeed explain," answered the Count.

"To-morrow, I shall be obliged to leave you, not to return to the occupation which has so long been a necessity to me in my troubles. Fortune at last returns to me and I am free. I think I have spoken to you in confidence of my situation, once at least, if not more often. My difficulties are at an end. I have received letters announcing that to-morrow I shall be reinstated in my possessions. You have shown me kindness—kindness, Herr Fischelowitz, and, what has been more than kindness to me, you have shown me great courtesy. Every one has not treated the poor gentleman with the same forbearance. But let bygones be bygones. On the occasion of my return to prosperity, permit me to offer you, as the only gift as yet within my means, the result of my last day's work within these walls. You have been very kind, and I thank you very sincerely."

There was a tremor in the Count's voice, and a moisture in his eyes, as he drew himself up in his threadbare decent frock-coat and held out his sinewy hand, stained with the long handling of tobacco in his daily labour. Fischelowitz smiled with uncommon cheerfulness as he grasped the bony fingers heartily.

"Thank you," he said. "I accept. I esteem it an honour to have been of any assistance to you in your temporary annoyances."

Vjera still hid her face. The Cossack watched what was happening with an expression half sad, half curious, and Dumnoff displayed a set of ferocious white teeth as he stupidly grinned from ear to ear.

CHAPTER II

Fischelowitz paid each worker for the day's work, in his quick, cheerful way, and each, being paid, passed out through the front shop into the street. Five minutes later the Count was strolling along the Maximilians-strasse in the direction of the royal palace. As he walked he drew himself up to the full height of his military figure and looked into the faces of the passers in the way with grave dignity. At that hour there were many people abroad, slim lieutenants in the green uniforms of the Uhlans and in the blue coats and crimson facings of the heavy cavalry, superior officers with silver or gold plaited epaulettes, slim maidens and plump matrons, beardless students in bright, coloured caps, and solemn, elderly civilians with great beards and greater spectacles, great Munich burghers and little Munich nobles, gaily dressed children of all ages, dogs of every breed from the Saint Bernard to the crooked-jointed Dachs, perambulators not a few and legions of nursery maids. Most of the people who passed cast a glance at the thoroughbred-looking man in the threadbare frock-coat who looked at them all with such an air of quiet superiority, carrying his head so high and putting down his feet with such a firm tread. There were doubtless those among the crowd who saw in the tired face the indications of a life-story not without

interest, for the crowd was not, nor ever is, in Munich, lacking in intelligent and observant persons. But in all the multitude there was not one man or woman who knew the name of the individual to whom the face belonged, and there were few who would have risked the respectability of their social position by making the acquaintance of a man so evidently poor, even if the occasion had presented itself.

But presently a figure was seen moving swiftly through the throng in the direction already taken by the Count, a figure of a type much more familiar to the sight of the Munich stroller, for it was that of a poorly dressed girl with a long plait of red-brown hair, carrying a covered brown straw basket upon one arm and hurrying along with the noiseless tread possible only in the extreme old age of shoes that were never strong. Poor Vjera had been sent by Fischelowitz with a thousand cigarettes to be delivered at one of the hotels. She was generally employed upon like errands, because she was the poorest in the establishment, and those who received the wares gave her a few pence for her trouble. She sped quickly onward, until she suddenly found herself close behind the Count. Then she slackened her pace and crept along as noiselessly as possible, her eyes fixed upon him as she walked and evidently doing her best not to overtake him nor to be seen by him. As luck would have it, however, the Count suddenly stood still before the show window of a picture-dealer's shop. A clever painting of a solitary Cossack riding along a stony mountain road, by Josef Brandt,

had attracted his attention. Then as he realised that he had looked at the picture a dozen times during the previous week, his eye wandered, and in the reflection of the plate-glass window he caught sight of Vjera's slight form at no great distance from him. He turned sharply upon his heels and met her eyes, taking off his limp hat with a courteous gesture.

"Permit me," he said, laying his hand upon the basket and trying to take it from her.

Poor Vjera's face flushed suddenly, and her grip tightened upon the straw handle and she refused to let it go.

"No, you shall never do that again," she said quickly, trying to draw back from him.

"And why not? Why should I not do you a service?"

"The other day you took it—the people stared at you—they never stare at me, for I am only a poor girl——"

"And what are the people or what is their staring to me?" asked the Count, quietly. "I am not afraid of being taken for a servant or a porter, because I carry a lady's parcel. Pray give me the basket."

"Oh, no, pray let it be," cried Vjera, in great earnest. "I cannot bear to see you with such a thing in your hand."

They were still standing before the picture-dealer's window, while many people passed along the pavement. In trying to draw away, Vjera found herself suddenly in the stream, and just then a broad-shouldered officer

who chanced to be looking the other way came into collision with her, so roughly that she was forced almost into the Count's arms. The latter made a step forward.

"Is it your habit to jostle ladies in that way?" he asked in a sharp tone, addressing the stout lieutenant.

The latter muttered something which might be taken for an apology and passed on, having no intention of being drawn into a street quarrel with an odd-looking individual, who, from his accent, was evidently a foreigner. The Count's eyes darted an angry glance after the offender, and then he looked again at Vjera. In the little accident he had got possession of the basket. Thereupon he passed it to his left hand and offered Vjera his right arm.

"Did the insolent fellow hurt you?" he asked anxiously, in Polish.

"Oh, no—only give me my basket!" Vjera's face was painfully flushed.

"No, my dear child," said the Count, gravely. "You will not deny me the pleasure of accompanying you and of carrying your burden. Afterwards, if you will, we can take a little walk together, before I see you to your home."

"You are always so kind to me," answered the girl, bending her head, as though to hide her burning cheeks, but submitting at last to his will.

For some minutes they walked on in silence. Then Vjera showed by a gesture that she wished to cross the street, on the other side of which was situated one of the principal hotels of the city. In front of the

entrance Vjera put out her hand entreatingly towards her basket, but the Count took no notice of the attempt and resolutely ascended the steps of the porch by her side. Behind the swinging glass door stood the huge porter amply endowed with that military appearance so characteristic of all men in Germany who wear anything of the nature of an official costume.

"The lady has a package for some one here," said the Count, holding out the basket.

"For the head waiter," said Vjera, timidly.

The porter took the basket, set it down, touched the button of an electric bell and silently looked at the pair with the malignant scrutiny which is the prerogative of servants in their manner with those whom they are privileged to consider as their inferiors. Presently, however, meeting the Count's cold stare, he turned away and strolled up the vestibule. A moment later the head waiter appeared, glorious in a perfectly new evening coat and a phenomenal shirt front.

"Ah, my cigarettes!" he exclaimed briskly, and the Count heard the chink of the nickel pence, as the head waiter inserted two fat white fingers into the pocket of his exceedingly fashionable waistcoat.

The sight which must follow was one which the Count was anxious not to see. He therefore turned his back and pretended to brush from his sleeve a speck of dust revealed to his searching eye in the strong afternoon light which streamed through the open door. Then Vjera's low-spoken word of thanks and her light tread made him aware that she had received

her little gratuity; he stood politely aside while she passed out, and then went down the half-dozen steps with her. As they began to move up the street, he did not offer her his arm again.

"You are so kind, so kind to me," said poor Vjera. "How can I ever thank you!"

"Between you and me there is no question of thanks," answered her companion. "Or if there is to be such a question it should arise in another way. It is for me to thank you."

"For what?"

"For many things, all of which have proceeded from your kindness of heart and have resulted in making my life bearable during the past months— or years. I keep little account of time. How long is it since I have been making cigarettes for Fischelowitz, at the rate of three marks a thousand?"

"Ever since I can remember," answered Vjera. "It is six years since I came to work there as a little girl."

"Six years? That is not possible! You must be mistaken, it cannot be so long."

Vjera said nothing, but turned her face away with an expression of pain.

"Yes it is a long time, since all that happened," said the Count, thoughtfully. "I was a young man then, I am old now."

"Old! How can you say anything so untrue!" Vjera exclaimed with considerable indignation.

"Yes, I am old. It is no wonder. We say at home that 'strange earth dries without wind.' A foreign

land will make old bones of a man without the help of years. That is what Germany has done for me. And yet, how much older I should be but for you, dear Vjera! Shall we sit down here, in this quiet place, under the trees? You know it is all over to-morrow, and I am free at last. I would like to tell you my story."

Vjera, who was tired of the close atmosphere of the work-room and whose strength was not enough to let her walk far with pleasure, sat down upon the green bench willingly enough, but the nervous look of pain had not disappeared from her face.

"Is it of any use to tell it to me again?" she asked, sadly, as she leaned against the painted back-board.

The Count produced a cigarette and gravely lighted it, before he answered her, and when he spoke he seemed to attach little or no importance to her question.

"You see," he said, "it is all different now, and I can look at it from a different point of view. Formerly when I spoke of it, I am afraid that I spoke bitterly, for, of course, I could not foresee that it could all come right again so soon, so very soon. And now that this weary time is over I can look back upon it with some pride, if with little pleasure—save for the part you have played in my life, and—may I say it?—saving the part I have played in yours."

He put out his hand gently and tenderly touched hers, and there was something in the meeting of those two thin, yellow hands, stained with the same daily labour and now meeting for the first time thus, that

sent a thrill to the two hearts and that might have brought a look of thoughtful interest into eyes dulled and wearied by the ordinary sights of this world. Vjera did not resent the innocent caress, but the colour that came into her face was not of the same hue as that which had burned there when he had insisted upon carrying her basket. This time the blush was not painful to see, but rather shed a faint light of beauty over the plain, pale features. Poor Vjera was happy for a moment.

"I am very glad if I have been anything to you," she said. "I would I might have been more."

"More? I do not see—you have been gentle, forbearing, respecting my misfortunes, and trying to make others respect them. What more could you have done, or what more could you have been?"

Vjera was silent, but she softly withdrew her hand from his and gazed at the people in the distance. The Count smoked without speaking, for several minutes, closing his eyes as though revolving a great problem in his mind, then glancing sidelong at his companion's face, hesitating as though about to speak, checking himself and shutting his eyes again in meditation. Holding his cigarette between his teeth he clasped his fingers together tightly, unclasped them again and let his arms fall on each side of him. At last he turned sharply, as though resolved what to do.

He believed that he was on the very eve of recovering a vast fortune and of resuming a high position in the world. It was no wonder that there was a struggle

in his soul, when at that moment a new complication seemed to present itself. He was indeed sure that he did not love Vjera, and in the brilliant dreams which floated before his half-closed eyes, visions of beautiful and high-born women dazzled him with their smiles and enchanted him by the perfect grace of their movements. To-morrow he might choose his wife among such as they. But to-day Vjera was by his side, poor Vjera, who alone of those he had known during the years of his captivity had stood by him, had felt for him, had given him a sense of reliance in her perfect sincerity and honest affection. And her affection had grown into something more; it had developed into love during the last months. He had seen it, had known it, and had done nothing to arrest the growth. Nay, he had done worse. Only a moment ago he had taken her hand in a way which might well mislead an innocent girl. The Count, according to his lights, was the very incarnation of the theory, honour, in the practice, honesty. His path was clear. If he had deceived Vjera in the very smallest accent of word or detail of deed he must make instant reparation. This was the reason why he turned sharply in his seat and looked at her with a look which was certainly kind, but which was, perhaps, more full of determination than of lover-like tenderness.

"Vjera," he said, slowly, pausing on every syllable of his speech, "will you be my wife?"

Vjera looked at him long and shook her head in silence. Instead of blushing, she turned pale, chang-

ing colour with that suddenness which belongs to delicate or exhausted organisations. The Count did not heed the plain though unspoken negation, and continued to speak very slowly and earnestly, choosing his words and rounding his expressions as though he were making a declaration to a young princess instead of asking a poor Polish girl to marry him. He even drew himself together, as it were, with the movement of dignity which was habitual with him, straightening his back, squaring his shoulders and leaning slightly forward in his seat. As he began to speak again, Vjera clasped her hands upon her knees and looked down at the gravel of the public path.

"I am in earnest," he said. "To-morrow, all those rights to which I was born will be restored to me, and I shall enjoy what the world calls a great position. Am I so deeply indebted to the world that I must submit to all its prejudices and traditions? Has the world given me anything, in exchange for which it becomes my duty to consult its caprices or its social superstitions? Surely not. To whom am I most indebted, to the world which has turned its back on me during a temporary embarrassment and loss of fortune, or to my friend Vjera who has been faithfully kind all along? The question itself is foolish. I owe everything to Vjera, and nothing to the world. The case is simple, the argument is short and the verdict is plain. I will not take the riches and the dignities which will be mine by this time to-morrow to the feet of some high-born lady who, to-day, would look coldly on me

because I am not—not quite in the fashion, so far as outward appearance is concerned. But I will and I do offer all, wealth, title, dignity, everything to Vjera. And she shakes her head, and with a single gesture refuses it all. Why? Has she a reason to give? An argument to set up? A sensible ground for her decision? No, certainly not."

As he looked gravely towards her averted face, Vjera again shook her head, slowly and thoughtfully, with an air of unalterable determination. He seemed surprised at her obstinacy and watched her in silence for a few moments.

"I see," he said at last, very sadly. "You think that I do not love you." Vjera made no sign, and a long pause followed, during which the Count's features expressed great perplexity.

The day was drawing to its close and the low sun shot level rays through the trees of the Hofgarten, far above the heads of the laughing children, the gossiping nurses and the slowly moving crowd that filled the pavement along the drive in front of the palace. Vjera and the Count were seated on a bench which was now already in the shade. The air was beginning to grow chilly, but neither of them heeded the change.

"You think that I do not love you," said the Count again. "You are mistaken, deeply mistaken, Vjera."

The faint, soft colour rose in the poor girl's waxen cheeks, and there was an unaccustomed light in her weary blue eyes as they met his.

"I do not say," continued her companion, "that I

love you as boys love at twenty. I am past that. I am not a young man any more, and I have had misfortunes such as would have broken the hearts of most men, and of the kind that do not dispose to great love-passion. If my troubles had come to me through the love of a woman—it might have been otherwise. As it is—do you think that I have no love for you, Vjera? Do not think that, dear—do not let me see that you think it, for it would hurt me. There is much for you, much, very much."

"To-day," answered Vjera, sadly, "but not to-morrow."

"You are cruel, without meaning to be even unkind," said the Count in an unsteady voice. This time it was Vjera who took his hand in hers and pressed it.

"God forbid that I should have an unkind thought for you," she said, very tenderly.

The Count turned to her again and there was a moisture in his eyes of which he was unconscious.

"Then believe that I do truly love you, Vjera," he answered. "Believe that all that there is to give you, I give, and that my all is not a little. I love you, child, in a way—ah, well, you have your girlish dreams of love, and it is right that you should have them and it would be very wrong to destroy them. But they shall not be destroyed by me, and surely not by any other man, while I live. I shall grow young again, I will grow young for you, for, in years at least, I am not old. I will be a boy for you, Vjera, and I will love as boys

love, but with the strength of a man who has known sorrow and overlived it. You shall not feel that in taking me you are taking a father, a protector, a man to whom your youth seems childhood, and your youthfulness childish folly. No, no—I will be more than that to you, I will be all to you that you are to me, and more, and more, each day, till love has made us of one age, of one mind, of one heart. Do you not believe that all this shall be? Speak, dear. What is there yet behind in your thoughts?"

"I cannot tell. I wish I knew." Vjera's answer was scarcely audible, and she turned her face from him.

"And yet there is something, you are keeping something from me, when I have kept nothing from you. Why is it? Why do you not quite trust me and believe in me? I can make you happy, now. Yesterday it was different, and so it was in all the yesterdays of yesterdays. I had nothing to offer you but myself."

"It were best so," said Vjera in a low voice.

The Count was silent. There was something in her manner which he could not understand, or rather, as he fancied, there was something in his own brain which prevented him from understanding a very simple matter, and he grew impatient with himself. At the same time he felt more and more strongly drawn to the young girl at his side. As the sun went down and the evening shadows deepened, he saw more in her face than he had been accustomed to see there. Every line of the pale features so familiar to his sight in his every-

day life, reminded him of moments in the recent past when he had been wretchedly unhappy, and when the kindly look in Vjera's face had comforted him and made life seem less unbearable. In his dreary world she alone had shown that she cared whether he lived or died, were insulted or respected, were treated like a dog or like a Christian man. The kindness of his employer was indeed undeniable, but it was of the sort which grated upon the sensitive nature of the unfortunate cigarette-maker, for it was in itself vulgarly cheerful, assuming that, after all, the Count should be contented with his lot. But Vjera had always seemed to understand him, to feel for him, to foresee his sensibilities as it were, and to be prepared for them. In a measure appreciable to himself she admired him, and admiration alone can make pity palatable to the proud. In her eyes his constancy under misfortune was as admirable as his misfortunes themselves were worthy of commiseration. In her eyes he was a gentleman, and one who had a right to hold his head high among the best. When he was poorest, he had felt himself to be in her eyes a hero. Are there many men who can resist the charm of the one woman who believes them to be heroic? Are not most men, too, really better for the trust and faith that is placed in them by others, as the earthen vessel, valueless in itself, becomes a thing of prize and beauty under the loving hand of the artist who draws graceful figures upon it and colours it skilfully, and handles it tenderly?

And now the poor man was puzzled and made

anxious by the girl's obstinate rejection of his offer. A chilly thought took shape in his mind and pained him exceedingly.

"Vjera," he said at last, "I see how it is. You have never loved me. You have only pitied me. You are good and kind, Vjera, but I wish it had been otherwise."

He spoke very quietly, in a subdued tone, and the moisture which had been more than once in his eyes since he had sat down beside the young girl, now almost took the shape of a tear. He was wounded in his innocent vanity, in the last stronghold of his fast-fading individuality. But Vjera turned quickly at the words and a momentary fire illuminated her pale blue eyes and dispelled the misty veil that seemed to dull them.

"Whatever you say, do not say that!" she exclaimed. "I love you with all my heart—I—ah, if you only understood, if you only knew, if you only guessed!"

"That is it," answered the Count. "If I only could —but there is something that passes my understanding."

The look of pain faded from his face and gave way to a bright smile, so bright, so rare, that it restored in the magic of an instant the freshness of early youth to the weary mask of sorrow. Then he covered his eyes with his hands as though searching his memory for something he could not find.

"What is it?" he asked, after a short pause and looking suddenly at Vjera. "It is something I ought to remember and yet something I have quite forgotten.

Help me, Vjera, tell me what you are thinking of, and I will explain it all."

"I was thinking of this day a week ago," said Vjera, and a little sob escaped her as she quickly looked away.

"A week ago? Let me see—what happened a week ago? But why should I ask? Nothing ever happens to me, nothing until now? And now, oh Vjera, it is you who do not understand, it is you who do not know, who cannot guess."

As if he had forgotten everything else in the sudden realisation of his return to liberty and fortune, he began to speak quickly and excitedly in a tone louder and clearer than that of his ordinary voice.

"No," he cried, "you can never guess what this change is to me. You can never know what I enjoy in the thought of being myself again, you cannot understand what it is to have been rich and great, and to be poor and wretched, and to regain wealth and dignity again by the stroke of a pen in the vibration of a second. And yet it is true, all true, I tell you, to-day, at last, after so much waiting. To-morrow they will come to my lodging to fetch me—a court carriage or two, and many officials who will treat me with the old respect I was used to long ago. They will come up my little staircase, bringing money, immense quantities of money, and the papers and the parchments and the seals. How they will stare at my poor lodging, for they have never known that I have been so wretched. Yes, one will bring money in a black leathern case—I know just how it will look—and another will have

with him a box full of documents—all lawfully mine—and a third will bring my orders, that I once wore, and with them the order of Saint Alexander Nevsky and a letter on broad heavy paper, signed Alexander Alexandrovitch, signed by the Tsar himself, Vjera. And I shall go with them to be received in audience by the Prince Regent here, before I leave for Petersburg. And then, after dinner, in the evening, I will get into my special carriage in the express train and my servants will make me comfortable and then away, away, a night and a day, and another night and perhaps a few hours more and I shall be at home at last, in my own great, beautiful home, far out in the glorious country among the woods and the streams and the birds; and I shall be driven in an open carriage with four horses up from the village through the great avenue of poplars to the grand old house. But before I go in I will go to the tomb—yes, I will go to the tomb among the trees, and I will say a prayer for my father and ——"

"Your father?" Vjera started slightly. She had listened to the long catalogue of the poor man's anticipations with a sad, unchanging face, as though she had heard it all before. But at the mention of his father's death she seemed surprised.

"Yes. He is dead at last, and my brother died on the same day. I have had letters. There was a disease abroad in the village. They caught it and they died. And now everything is mine, everything, the lands and the houses and the money, all, all mine. But I will say a prayer for them, now that they are

dead and I shall never see them again. God knows, they treated me ill when they were alive, but death has them at last."

The Count's eyes grew suddenly cold and hard, so that Vjera shuddered as she caught the look of hatred in them.

"Death, death, death!" he cried. "Death the judge, the gaoler, the executioner! He has done justice on them for me, and they will not break loose from the house he has made for them to lie in and to sleep in for ever. And now, friend Death, I am master in their stead, and you must give me time to enjoy the mastership before you serve me likewise. Oh, Vjera, the joy, the delight, the ecstacy, the glory of it all!"

He struck the palms of his lean hands together with the gesture of a boy, and laughed aloud in the sheer overflowing of his heart. But Vjera sat still, silent and thoughtful, beside him, watching him rather anxiously as though she feared lest the excess of his happiness might do him an injury.

"You do not say anything, Vjera. You do not seem glad," he said, suddenly noticing her expression.

"I am very glad, indeed I am," she answered, smiling with a great effort. "Who would not be glad at the thought of seeing you enjoy your own again?"

"It is not for the money, Vjera!" he exclaimed in a lower and more concentrated tone. "It is not really for the money nor for the lands, not even for the position or the dignity. Do you know what it is that makes me so happy? I have got the best of it. That

is it. It has been a long struggle and a weary one, but I knew I should win, though I never saw how it was to be. When they turned me away from them like a dog, my father and my brother, I faced them on the threshold for the last time and I said to them, 'Look you, you have made an outcast of me, and yet I am your son, my father, and your brother, my brother, and you know it. And yet I tell you that when we meet again, I shall be master here, and not you.' And so it has turned out, Vjera, for they shall meet me—they dead, and I alive. They jeered and laughed, and sent me away with only the clothes I wore, for I would not take their money. I hear their laughter now in my ears—but I hear, too, a laugh that is louder and more pitiless than theirs was, for it is the laugh of Death!"

CHAPTER III

The Count rose to his feet as he finished the last sentence. It seemed as though he were oppressed by the inaction to which he was constrained during the last hours of waiting before the great moment, and he moved nervously, like a man anxious to throw off a burden.

Vjera rose also, with a slow and weary movement.

"It is late," she said. "I must go home. Good-night."

"No. I will go with you. I will see you to your door."

"Thank you," she answered, watching his face closely.

Then the two walked side by side under the lime trees in the deepening evening shadows, to the low archway by which the road leads out of the Hofgarten on the side of the city. For some minutes neither spoke, but Vjera could hear her companion's quickly drawn, irregular breath. His heart was beating fast and his thoughts were chasing each other through a labyrinth of dreams, inconsequent, unreasonable, but brilliant in the extreme. His head high, his shoulders thrown back, his eyes flashing, his lips tightly closed, the Count marched out with his companion into the broad square. He felt that this had been the last day

of his slavery and that the morrow's sun was to rise upon a brighter and a happier period of his life, in which there should be no more poverty, no more manual labour, no more pinching and grinding and tormenting of himself in the hopeless effort at outward and visible respectability. Poor Vjera saw in his face what was passing in his mind, but her own expression of sadness did not change. On the contrary, since his last outbreak of triumphant satisfaction she had been more than usually depressed. For a long time the Count did not again notice her low spirits, being absorbed in the contemplation of his own splendid future. At last he seemed to recollect her presence at his side, glanced at her, made as though to say something, checked himself, and began humming snatches from an old opera. But either his musical memory did not serve him, or his humour changed all at once, for he suddenly was silent again, and after glancing once more at Vjera's downcast face his own became very grave.

He had been brought back to present considerations, and he found himself in one of those dilemmas with which his genuine pride, his innocent and harmless vanity and his innate kindness constantly beset his life. He had asked Vjera to marry him, scarcely half an hour earlier, and he now found himself separated from the moment which had given birth to the generous impulse, by a lengthened contemplation of his own immediate return to wealth and importance.

He was deeply attached to the poor Polish girl, as

men shipwrecked upon desert islands grow fond of persons upon whom they could have bestowed no thought in ordinary life. He had grown well accustomed to his poor existence, and in the surroundings in which he found himself, Vjera was the one being in whom, besides sympathy for his misfortune, he discovered a sensibility rarer than common, and the unconscious development of a natural refinement. There are strange elements to be found in all great cities among the colonies of strangers who make their dwellings therein. Brought together by trouble, they live in tolerance among themselves, and none asks the other the fundamental question of upper society, "Whence art thou?"—nor does any make of his neighbour the inquiry which rises first to the lips of the man of action, "Whither goest thou?" They meet as the seaweed meets on the crest of the wave, of many colours from many distant depths, to intermingle for a time in the motion of the waters, to part company under the driving of the north wind, to be drifted at last, forgetful of each other, by tides and currents which wash the opposite ends of the earth. This is the life of the emigrant, of the exile, of the wanderer among men; the incongruous elements meet, have brief acquaintance and part, not to meet again. Who shall count the faces that the exile has known, the voices that have been familiar in his ear, the hands that have pressed his? In every land and in every city, he has met and talked with a score, with scores, with hundreds of men and women all leading the more or

less mysterious and uncertain life which has become his own by necessity or by choice. If he be an honest man and poor, a dozen trades have occupied his fingers in half a dozen capitals; if he be dishonest, a hundred forms and varieties of money-bringing dishonesty are sheathed like arrows in his quiver, to be shot unawares into the crowd of well-to-do and unsuspecting citizens on the borders of whose respectable society the adventurer warily picks his path.

It is rarely that two persons meet under such circumstances between whom the bond of a real sympathy exists and can develop into lasting friendship between man and man, or into true love between man and woman. When both feel themselves approaching such a point, they are also unconsciously returning to civilisation, and with the civilising influence arises the desire to ask the fatal question, "Whence art thou?"—or the fear lest the other may ask it, and the anxiety to find an answer where there is none that will bear scrutiny.

It was therefore natural that the Count should feel disturbed at what he had done, in spite of his sincere and honourable wish to abide by his proposal and to make Vjera his wife. He felt that in returning to his own position in the world he owed it in a measure to himself to wed with a maiden of whom he could at least say that she came of honest people. Always centred in his own alternating hopes and fears, and conscious of little in the lives of others, it seemed to him that a great difficulty had suddenly revealed itself to his apprehensions. At the same time, by a self-

contradiction familiar to such natures as his, he felt himself more and more strongly drawn to the girl, and more and more strictly bound in honour to marry her. As he thought of this, his habitual contempt of the world and its opinion returned. What had the world done for him? And if he had felt no obligation to consult it in his poverty, why need he bend to any such slavery in the coming days of his splendour? He stopped suddenly at the corner of the street in which the Polish girl lived. She lodged, with a little sister who was still too young to work, in a room she hired of a respectable Bohemian shoemaker. The latter's wife was of the sour-good kind, whose chief talent lies in giving their kind actions a hard-hearted appearance.

"Vjera," said the Count, earnestly, "I have been talking a great deal about myself. You must forgive me, for the news I have received is so very important and makes such a sudden difference in my prospects. But you have not given me the answer I want to my question. Will you be my wife, Vjera, and come with me out of this wretched existence to share my happy life and to make it happier? Will you?"

His tone was so sincere and loving that it produced a little storm of evanescent happiness in the girl's heart, and the tears started to her eyes and stained her sallow, waxen cheeks.

"Ah, if it could only be true!" she exclaimed in a voice more than half full of hope, as she quickly brushed away the drops.

"But it is true, indeed it is," answered the Count.

"Oh, Vjera, do you think I would deceive you? Do you think I could tell you a story in which there is no truth whatever? Do not think that of me, Vjera."

The tears broke out afresh, but from a different source. For some seconds she could not speak.

"Why do you cry so bitterly?" he asked, not understanding at all what was passing. "I swear to you it is all true ——"

"It is not that—it is not that," cried Vjera. "I know—I know that you believe it—and I love you so very much ——"

"But then, I do not understand," said the Count in a low voice that expressed his pitiful perplexity. "How can I not believe it, when it is all in the letters? And why should you not believe it, too? Besides, Vjera, dear, it will all be quite clear to-morrow. Of course—well, I can understand that having known me poor so long, it must seem strange to you to think of me as very rich. But I shall not be another man, for that. I shall always be the same for you, Vjera, always the same."

"Yes, always the same," sighed the girl under her breath.

"Yes, and so, if you love me to-day, you will love me just as well to-morrow—to-morrow, the great day for me. What day will it be? Let me see—to-morrow is Wednesday."

"Wednesday, yes," repeated Vjera. "If only there were no to-morrow ——" She checked herself. "I mean," she added, quickly, "if only it could be Thursday, without any day between."

"You are a strange girl, Vjera. I do not know what you are thinking of to-day. But to-morrow you will see. I think they will come for me in the morning. You shall see, you shall see."

Vjera began to move onward, and the Count walked by her side, wondering at her manner and tormenting his brain in the vain effort to understand it. In front of her door he held out his hand.

"Promise me one thing," he said, as she laid her fingers in his and looked up at him. Her eyes were still full of tears.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Promise that you will be my wife, when you are convinced that all this good fortune is real. You do not believe in it, though I cannot tell why. I only ask that when you are obliged to believe in it you will do as I ask."

Vjera hesitated, and as she stood still the hand he held trembled nervously.

"I promise," she said, at last, as though with a great effort. Then, all at once, she covered her eyes and leaned against the door-post. He laid his hand caressingly upon her shoulder.

"Is it so hard to say?" he asked, tenderly.

"Oh, but if it should ever be indeed true!" she moaned. "If it should—if it should!"

"What then? Shall we not be happy together? Will it not be even pleasant to remember these wretched years?"

"But if it should turn out so—oh, how can I ever be a fitting wife for you, how can I learn all that a

great lady must think, and do, and say? I shall be unworthy of you—of your new friends, of your new world—but then, it cannot really happen. No—do not speak of it any more, it hurts me too much—good-night, good-night! Let us sleep and forget, and go back to our work in the morning, as though nothing had happened—in the morning, to-morrow. Will you? Then good-night."

"There will be no work to-morrow," he said, returning to his argument. But she broke away and fled from him and disappeared in the dark and narrow staircase. As he stood, he could hear her light tread on the creaking wood of the steps, fainter and fainter in the distance. Then he caught the feeble tinkle of a little bell, the opening and shutting of a door, and he was alone in the gloom of the evening.

For some minutes he stood still, as though listening for some faint echo from the direction in which Vjera had disappeared, then he slowly and thoughtfully walked away. He had forgotten to eat at dinner-time, and now he forgot that the hour of the second meal had come round. He walked on, not knowing and not caring whither he went, absorbed in the contemplation of the bright pictures which framed themselves in his brain, troubled only by his ever-recurring wonder at Vjera's behaviour.

Unconsciously, and from sheer force of habit, he threaded the streets in the direction of the tobacconist's shop where so much of his time was spent. If it be not true that the ghosts of the dead haunt places

familiar to them in life, yet the superstition is founded upon the instincts of human nature. Men begin to haunt certain spots unconsciously while they are alive, especially those which they are obliged to visit every day and in which they are accustomed to sit idle or at work, during the greater part of the week. The artist, when he wishes to be completely at rest, re-enters the studio he left but an hour earlier; the sailor hangs about the port when he is ashore, the shopman cannot resist the temptation to spend an hour among his wares on Sunday, the farmer is irresistibly drawn to the field to while away the time on holidays between dinner and supper. We all of us see more and understand better what we see, in those surroundings most familiar to us, and it is a general law that the average intelligence likes the best that which it understands with the least effort. The mechanical part of us, too, when free from any direct and especial impulse of the mind, does unknowingly what it has been in the habit of doing. Two-thirds of all the physical diseases in the world are caused by the disturbance of the mental habits, and are vastly aggravated by the direction of the thoughts to the part afflicted. Idiots and madmen are often phenomenally healthy people, because there is in their case no unnatural effort of the mind to control and manage the body. The Count having bestowed no thought upon the direction of his walk, mechanically turned towards the scene of his daily labour.

Considering that he believed himself to have abandoned for ever the irksome employment of rolling to-

bacco in a piece of parchment in order to slip it into a piece of paper, it might have been supposed that he would be glad to look at anything rather than the glass door of the shop in which he had repeated that operation so many hundreds of thousands of times; or, at least, it might have been expected that on realising where he was he would be satisfied with a glance of recognition and would turn away.

But the Count's fate had ordained otherwise. When he reached the shop the lights were burning brightly in the show window and within. Through the glass door he could see that Fischelowitz was comfortably installed in a chair behind the counter, contentedly smoking one of his own best cigarettes, and smiling happily to himself through the fragrant cloud. If the tobacconist's wife had been present, the Count would have gone away without entering, for he did not like her, and had reason to suspect that she hated him, which was indeed the case. But Akulina was nowhere to be seen, the shop looked bright and cheerful, the Count was tired, he pushed the door and entered. Fischelowitz turned his head without modifying his smile, and seeing who his visitor was, nodded familiarly. The Count raised his hat a little from his head and immediately replaced it.

"Good-evening, Herr Fischelowitz," he said, speaking, as usual, in German.

"Good-evening, Count," answered the tobacconist, cheerfully. "Sit down, and light a cigarette. What is the news?"

"Great news with me, for to-morrow," said the other, bending his head as he stooped over the nickel-plated lamp on the counter, in which a tiny flame burned for the convenience of customers. "To-morrow, at this time, I shall be on my way to Petersburg."

"Well, I hope so, for your sake," was the good-humoured reply. "But I am afraid it will always be to-morrow, Herr Graf."

The Count shook his head after staring for a few seconds at his employer, and then smoked quietly, as though he attached no weight to the remark. Fischelowitz looked curiously at him, and during a brief moment the smile faded from his face.

"You have not been long at supper," he remarked, after a pause. The observation was suggested by the condition of his own appetite.

"Supper?" repeated the Count, rather vaguely. "I believe I had forgotten all about it. I will go presently."

"The Count is reserving himself for to-morrow," said an ironical voice in the background. Akulina entered the shop from the workroom, a guttering candle in a battered candlestick in one hand, and a number of gaily coloured pasteboard boxes tucked under the other arm. "What is the use of eating to-day when there will be so many good things to-morrow?"

Neither Fischelowitz nor the Count vouchsafed any answer to this thrust. For the second time, since the Count had entered, however, the tobacconist

wore an expression approaching to gravity. The Count himself kept his composure admirably, only glancing coldly at Akulina, and then looking at his cigarette. Akulina is a broad, fat woman, with a flattened Tartar face, small eyes, good but short teeth, full lips and a dark complexion. She reminds one of an over-fed tabby cat, of doubtful temper, and her voice seems to reach utterance after traversing some thick, soft medium, which lends it an odd sort of guttural richness. She moves quietly but heavily and has an Asiatic second sight in the matter of finance. In matters of thrift and foresight her husband places implicit confidence in her judgment. In matters of generosity and kindness implying the use of money, he never consults her.

"It is amazing to see how much people will believe," she said, putting out her candle and snuffing it with her thumb and forefinger. Then she began to arrange the boxes she had brought, setting them in order upon the shelves. Still neither of the men answered her. But she was not the woman to be reduced to silence by silence.

"I am always telling you that it is all rubbish," she continued, turning a broad expanse of alpaca-covered back upon her audience. "I am always telling you that you are no more a count than Fischelowitz is a grand duke, that the whole thing is a foolish imagination which you have stuck into your head, as one sticks tobacco into a paper shell. And it ought to be burned out of your head, or starved out, or knocked out, or

something, for if it stays there it will addle your brains altogether. Why cannot you see that you are in the world just like other people, and give up all these ridiculous dreams and all this chatter about counts and princes and such-like people, of whom you never spoke to one in your life, for all you may say?"

The Count glanced at the back of Akulina's head, which was decently covered by a flattened twist of very shining black hair, and then he looked at Fischelowitz as though to inquire whether the latter would suffer a gentleman to be thus insulted in his presence and on his premises. Fischelowitz seemed embarrased, and coloured a little.

"You might choose your language a little more carefully, wife," he observed in a rather timid tone.

"And you might choose your friends with a better view to our own interests," she answered without hesitation. "If you allow this sort of thing to go on, and four children growing up, and you expecting to open another shop this summer—why, you had better turn count yourself," she concluded, triumphantly, and with that nice logical perception peculiar to her kind.

"If you mean to say that the Count's valuable help has not been to our advantage ——" began Fischelowitz, making a desperate effort to give a more pleasant look to things.

"Oh, I know that," laughed Akulina, scornfully. "I know that the Count, as you call him, can make his two thousand a day as well as any one. I am not blind.

And I know you, and I know that it is a sort of foolish pleasure to you to employ a count in the work and to pay your money to a count, though he does not earn it any better than any one else, nor any worse, to be just. And I know the Count, and I know his friends who borrow fifty marks of you and pay you back in stuffed dolls with tunes in them. I know you, Christian Gregorovitch"—at the thought of the lost money Akulina broke at last into her native language and gave the reins to her fury in good Russian—"yes, I know you, and him, and his friends and your friends, and I see the good yellow money flying out of the window like a flight of canary birds when the cage is opened, and I see you grinning like Player-ape over the vile Vienna puppet, and winding up its abominable music as though you were turning the key upon your money in the safe instead of listening to the tune of its departure. And then because Akulina has the courage to tell you the truth, and to tell you that your fine Count is no count, and that his friends get from you ten times the money he earns, then you turn on me like a bear, ready to bite off my head, and you tell me to choose my language! Is there no shame in you, Christian Gregorovitch, or is there also no understanding? Am I the mother of your four children or not? I would like to ask. I suppose you cannot deny that, whatever else you deny which is true, and you tell me to choose my language! *Da,* I will choose my language, in truth! *Da,* I will choose out such a swarm of words as ought to sting your ears like hornets, if you had not

such a leathery skin and such a soft brain inside it. But why should I? It is thrown away. There is no shame in you. You see nothing, you care for nothing, you hear no reason, you feel no argument. I will go home and make soup. I am better there than in the shop. Oh, yes! it is always that. Akulina can make good things to eat, and good tea and good punch to drink, and Akulina is the Archangel Michael in the kitchen. But if Akulina says to you, 'Save a penny here, do not lend more than you have there,' Akulina is a fool and must be told to choose her language, lest it be too indelicate for the dandified ears of the high-born gentleman! I should not wonder if, by choosing her language carefully enough, Akulina ended by making the high-born gentleman understand something after all. His perception cannot possibly be so dull as yours, Christian Gregorovitch, my little husband."

Akulina paused for breath after her tremendous invective, which, indeed, was only intended by her for the preface of the real discourse, so fertile was her imagination and so thoroughly roused was her eloquence by the sense of injury received. While she was speaking, Fischelowitz, whose terror of his larger half was only relative, had calmly risen and had wound up the "Wiener Gigerl" to the extreme of the doll's powers, placing it on the counter before him and sitting down before it in anticipation of the amusement he expected to derive from its performance. In the short silence which ensued while Akulina was resting her lungs for a second and more deadly effort, the wretched

little musical box made itself heard, clicking and scratching and grinding out a miserable little polka. At the sound, the sunny smile returned to the tobacconist's face. He knew that no earthly eloquence, no scathing wit, no brutal reply could possibly exasperate his wife as this must. He resented everything she had said, and in his vulgar way he was ashamed that she should have said it before the Count, and now he was glad that by the mere turning of a key he could answer her storm of words in a way to drive her to fury, while at the same time showing his own indifference. As for the Count himself, he had moved nearer to the door and was looking quietly out into the irregularly lighted street, smoking as though he had not heard a word of what had been said. As he stood, it was impossible for either of the others to see his face, and he betrayed no agitation by movement or gesture.

Akulina turned pale to the lips, as her husband had anticipated. It is probable that the most tragic event conceivable in her existence could not have affected her more powerfully than the twang of the musical box and the twisting and turning of the insolent little wooden head. She came round to the front of the counter with gleaming eyes and clenched fists.

"Stop that thing!" she cried. "Stop it, or it will drive me mad."

Fischelowitz still smiled, and the doll continued to turn round and round to the tune, while the Count looked out through the open door. Suddenly there was a quick shadow on the brightly lighted floor of

the shop, followed instantly by a crash, and then with a miserable attempt to finish its tune the little instrument gave a resounding groan and was silent. Akulina had struck the Gigerl such a blow as had sent it flying, pedestal and all, past her husband's head into a dark corner behind the counter. Fischelowitz reddened with anger, and Akulina stood ready to take to flight, glad that the broad counter was between herself and her husband. Her fury had spent itself in one blow and she would have given anything to set the doll up in its place again unharmed. She realised at the same instant that she had probably destroyed any intrinsic value which the thing possessed, and her face fell wofully. The Count turned slowly where he stood and looked at the couple.

"Are you going to fight each other?" he inquired in unusually bland tones.

At the sound of his voice the Russian woman's anger rose again, glad to find some new object upon which to expend itself and on which to exercise vengeance for the catastrophe its last expression had brought about. She turned savagely upon the Count and shook her plump brown fists in his face.

"It is all your fault!" she exclaimed. "What business have you to come between husband and wife with your friends and your cursed dolls, the fiend take them and you! Is it for this that Christian Gregorovitch and I have lived together in harmony these ten years and more? Is it for this that we have lived without a word of anger ——"

"What did you say?" asked Fischelowitz, with an angry laugh. But she did not heed him.

"Without a word of anger between us, these many years?" she continued. "Is it for this? To have our peace destroyed by a couple of Wiener Gigerls, a doll and a sham count? But it is over now! It is over, I tell you—go, get yourself out of the shop, out of my sight, into the street where you belong! For honest folks to be harbouring such a fellow as you are, and not you only, but your friends and your rag and your tag! Fie! If you stay here long we shall end in dust and feathers! But you shall not stay here, whatever that soft-brained husband of mine says. You shall go and never come back. Do you think that in all Munich there is no one else who will do the work for three marks a thousand? Bah! there are scores, and honest people, too, who call themselves by plain names and speak plainly! None of your counts and your grand dukes and your Lord-knows-whats! Go, you adventurer, you disturber of—why do you look at me like that? I have always known the truth about you, and I have never been able to bear the sight of you and never shall. You have deceived my husband, poor man, because he is not as clever as he is good-natured, but you never could deceive me, try as you would, and the Lord knows, you have tried often enough. Pah! You good-for-nothing!"

The poor Count had drawn back against the well-filled shop and had turned deadly pale as she heaped insult upon insult upon him in her incoherent and

foul-mouthed anger. As soon as she paused, exhausted by the effort to find epithets to suit her hatred of him, he went up to the counter where Fischelowitz was sitting very much disturbed at the course events were taking.

"My dear Count," began the latter, anxious to set matters right, "pray do not pay any attention ——"

"I think I had better say good-bye," answered the Count in a low tone. "We part on good terms, though you might have said a word for me just now."

"He dare not!" cried Akulina.

"And as for the doll, if you will give it to me, I promise you that you shall have your fifty marks to-morrow."

"Oho! He knows where to get fifty marks now!" exclaimed Akulina, viciously.

Fischelowitz picked up the puppet, which was broken in two in the waist, so that the upper half of the body hung down by the legs, in a limp fashion, held only by the little red coat. The tobacconist wrapped it up in a piece of newspaper without a word and handed it to the Count. He felt perhaps that the only atonement he could offer for his wife's brutal conduct was to accede to the request.

"Thank you," said the Count, taking the thing. "On the word of a gentleman you shall have the money before to-morrow night."

"A good riddance of both of them," snarled Akulina, as the Count lifted his hat and then, his head bent more than was his wont, passed out of the shop with the remains of the poor Gigerl under his arm.

CHAPTER IV

The Count had no precise object in view when he hurriedly left the shop with the parcel containing the broken doll. What he most desired for the moment was to withdraw himself from the storm of Akulina's abuse, seeing that he had no means of checking the torrent, nor of exacting satisfaction for the insults received. However he might have acted had the aggressor been a man, he was powerless when attacked by a woman, and he was aware that he had followed the only course which had in it anything of dignity and self-respect. To stand and bandy words and epithets of abuse would have been worse than useless, to treat the tobacconist like a gentleman and to hold him responsible for his wife's language would have been more than absurd. So the Count took the remains of the puppet and went on his way.

He was not, however, so superior to good and bad treatment as not to feel deeply wounded and thoroughly roused to anger. Perhaps, if he had been already in possession of the fortune and dignity which he expected on the morrow, he might have smiled contemptuously at the virago's noisy wrath, feeling nothing and caring even less what she felt towards him. But he had too long been poor and wretched to bear with equanimity any reference to his wretchedness or his poverty, and

he was too painfully conscious of the weight of outward circumstances in determining men's judgments of their fellows not to be stung by the words that had been so angrily applied to him. Moreover, and worst of all, there was the fact that Fischelowitz had really lent the money to a poor countryman who had previously made the acquaintance of the Count, and had by that means induced the tobacconist to help him. It was true, indeed, that the poor Count had himself lent the fellow all he had in his pocket, which meant all that he had in the world, and had been half starved in consequence during a whole week. The man was an idle vagabond of the worst type, with a pitiful tale of woe well worded and logically put together, out of which he made a good livelihood. Nature, as though to favour his designs, had given him a face which excited sympathy, and he had the wit to cover his eyes, his own tell-tale feature, with coloured glasses. He had cheated several scores of persons in the Slav colony of Munich, and had then gone in search of other pastures. How he had obtained possession of the Wiener Gigerl was a mystery as yet unsolved. It had certainly seemed odd in the tobacconist's opinion that a man of such outward appearance should have received such an extremely improbable Christmas present, for such the adventurer declared the doll to be, from a rich aunt in Warsaw, who refused to give him a penny of ready money and had caused him to be turned from her doors by her servants when he had last visited her, on the ground that he had joined the Russian Orthodox Church with-

out her consent. The facetious young villain had indeed declared that she had sent him the puppet as a piece of scathing irony, illustrative of his character as she conceived it. But though such an illustration would have been apt beyond question, yet it seemed improbable that the aunt would have chosen such a means of impressing it upon her nephew's mind. Fischelowitz, however, asked no questions, and took the Gigerl as payment of the debt. The thing amused him, and it diverted him to construct an imaginary chain of circumstances to explain how the man in the coloured glasses had got possession of it. It was of course wholly inconceivable that even the most accomplished shop-lifter should have carried off an object of such inconvenient proportions from the midst of its fellows and under the very eyes of the vendor. If he had supposed a theft possible, Fischelowitz would never have allowed the doll to remain on his premises a single day. He was too kind-hearted, also, to blame the Count, as his wife did, for having been the promoter of the loan, for he readily admitted that he would have lent as much, had he made the vagabond's acquaintance under any other circumstances.

But the Count, since Akulina had expressed herself with so much force and precision, could not look upon the affair in the same light. However Fischelowitz regarded it, Akulina had made it clear that the Count ought to be held responsible for the loss, and it was not in the nature of such a man, no matter how wretched his own estate, to submit to the imputation

of being concerned in borrowing money which was never to be repaid. His natural impulse had been to promise repayment instantly, as he was expecting to be turned into a rich man on the morrow the engagement seemed an easy one to keep. It would be more difficult to explain why he wanted to take away the broken puppet with him. Possibly he felt that in removing it from the shop he was taking with it even the memory of the transaction of which the blame had been so bitterly thrown on him; or, possibly, he was really attached to the toy for its associations, or, lastly, he may have felt impelled to save it from Akulina's destroying wrath, so far as it yet could be said to be saved.

As has been said, he had not dined on that day, and he would very probably have forgotten to eat, even after being reminded of the meal by the tobacconist, had he not passed, on his way homeward, the obscure restaurant in which he and the other men who worked for Fischelowitz were accustomed to get their food and drink. This fifth-rate eating-house rejoiced in the attractive name of the "Green Wreath," a designation painted in large dusty green Gothic letters upon the grey walls of the dilapidated house in which it was situated. There are not to be found in respectable Munich those dens of filth and drunkenness which belong to greater cities whose vices are in proportion greater also. In Munich the strength of fiery spirits is drowned in oceans of mild beer, a liquid of which the head will stand more than the waist-band and

which, instead of exciting to crime, predisposes the consumer to peaceful and lengthened sleep. The worst that can be said of the poorer public-houses in Munich, is that they are frequented by the poorer people, and that as the customers bring less money than elsewhere, there is less drinking in proportion and a greater demand for large quantities of very filling food at very low rates. As a general rule, such places are clean and decently kept, and the sight of a drunken man in the public room would excite very considerable astonishment, besides entailing upon the culprit a summary expulsion into the street and a rather forcible injunction not to repeat the offence.

The four windows of the establishment which opened upon the narrow street were open, for the weather had become sultry even out of doors, and the guests wanted fresh air. At one of these windows the Count saw the heads of Dumnoff and Schmidt. With the instinct of the poor man, the Count felt in his pocket to see whether he had any money, and was somewhat disturbed to find but a solitary piece of silver, feebly supported on either side by a couple of one-penny pieces. He had forgotten that he had refused to accept his pay for the day's work, and it required an effort of memory to account for the low state of his funds. But what he had with him was sufficient for his wants, and settling his parcel under his arm he ascended the three or four steps which gave access to the inn, and entered the public room. Besides the Russian and the Cossack, there were three public

porters seated at the next table, dressed in their blue blouses, their red cloth caps hanging on the pegs over their heads, all silent and similarly engaged. Each had before him a piece of that national cheese of which the smell may almost be heard, each had lately received a thick, irregularly shaped hunch of dark bread, and they had one pot of beer and one salt-cellar amongst them. They all had honest German faces, honest blue eyes, horny hands and round shoulders. Another table, in a far corner, was occupied by a poorly dressed old woman in black, dusty and evidently tired. A covered basket stood on a chair at her elbow, she was eating an unwholesome-looking "knödel" or boiled potato-ball, and half a pint of beer stood before her still untouched. As for the Cossack and Dumnoff, they had finished their meal. The former was smoking a cigarette through a mouthpiece made by boring out the well-dried leg-bone of a chicken and was drinking nothing. Dumnoff had before him a small glass of the common whiskey known as "corn-brandy" and was trying to give it a flavour resembling the vodka of his native land by stirring pepper into it with the blade of an old pocket-knife. Both looked up, without betraying any surprise, as the Count entered and sat himself down at the end of their oblong table, facing the open window and with his back to the room. A word of greeting passed on each side and the two relapsed into silence, while the Count ordered a sausage "with horse-radish" of the sour-sweet maiden of five-and-thirty who waited on the guests. The Cossack, always observant

of such things, looked at the oddly shaped package which the Count had brought with him, trying to divine its contents and signally failing in the attempt, Dumnoff, who did not like the Count's gentlemanlike manners and fine speech, sullenly stirred the fiery mixture he was concocting. The colour on his prominent cheek-bones was a little brighter than before supper, but otherwise it was impossible to say that he was the worse for the half-pint of spirits he had certainly absorbed since leaving his work. The man's strong peasant nature was proof against far greater excesses than his purse could afford.

"What is the news?" inquired Johann Schmidt, still eying the bundle curiously, and doubtlessly hoping that the Count would soon inform him of the contents. But the latter saw the look and glanced suspiciously at the questioner.

"No news, that I know of," he answered. "Except for me," he added, after a pause, and looking dreamily out of the window at a street lamp that was burning opposite. "To-morrow, at this time, I shall be off."

"And where are you going?" asked the Cossack, good-humouredly. "Are you going for long, if I may ask?"

"Yes—yes. I shall never come back to Munich." He had been speaking in German, but noticing that the other guests in the room were silent, and thinking that they might listen, he broke off into Russian. "I shall go home, at last," he said, his face brightening perceptibly as his visions of wealth again rose before

his eyes. "I shall go home and rest myself for a long time in the country, and then, next winter, perhaps, I will go to Petersburg."

"Well, well, I wish you a pleasant journey," said Schmidt. "So there is to be no mistake about the fortune this time?"

"This time?" repeated the Count, as though not understanding. "Why do you say this time?"

"Because you have so often expected it before," returned the Cossack bluntly, but without malice.

"I do not remember ever saying so," said the other, evidently searching among his recollections.

"Every Tuesday," growled Dumnoff, sipping his peppery liquor. "Every Tuesday since I can remember."

"I think you must be mistaken," said the Count, politely.

Dumnoff grunted something quite incomprehensible, and which might have been taken for the clearing of his hugh throat after the inflaming draught. The Cossack was silent, and his bright eyes looked pitingly at his companion.

"And you have begun to put together your parcels for the journey, I see," he observed after a time, when the Count had got his morsel of food and was beginning to eat it. His curosity gave him no rest.

"Yes," answered the Count, mysteriously. "That is something which I shall probably take with me, as a remembrance of Munich."

"I should not have thought that you needed any-

thing more than a cigarette to remind you of the place," remarked Dumnoff.

The Count smiled faintly, for, considering Dumnoff's natural dulness, the remark had a savour of wit in it.

"That is true," he said. "But there are other things which could remind me even more forcibly of my exile."

"Well, what is it? Tell us!" cried Dumnoff, impatiently enough, but somewhat softened by the Count's appreciation of his humour. At the same time he put out his broad red hand in the direction of the parcel as though he would see for himself.

"Let it be!" said Schmidt sharply, and Dumnoff withdrew his hand again. He had fallen into the habit of always doing what the Cossack told him to do, obeying mutely, like a well-trained dog, though he obeyed no one else. The descendant of freemen instinctively lorded it over the descendant of the serf, and the latter as instinctively submitted.

The Count's temper, however, was singularly changeable on this day, for he did not seem to resent Dumnoff's meditated attack upon the package, as he would certainly have done under ordinary circumstances.

"If you are so very curious to know what it is, I will tell you," he said. "You know the Wiener Gigerl?"

"Of course," answered both men together.

"Well, that is it, in that parcel."

"The Gigerl!" exclaimed the Cossack. Dumnoff only opened his small eyes in stupid amazement. Both

know something of the circumstances under which Fischelowitz had come into possession of the doll, and both knew what store the tobacconist set by it.

"Then you have paid the fifty marks?" asked Schmidt, whose curiosity was roused instead of satisfied.

"No. I shall pay the money to-morrow. I have promised to do so. As it chances, it will be convenient." The Count smiled to himself in a meaning way, as though already enjoying the triumph of laying the gold pieces upon the counter under Akulina's flat nose.

"And yet Fischelowitz has already given it to you! He must be very sure of you ——" With his usual lack of tact, Schmidt had gone further than he meant to do, but the transaction savoured of the marvellous.

"To be strictly truthful," said the Count, who had a Quixotic fear of misleading in the smallest degree any one to whom he was speaking, "to be exactly honest, there is a circumstance which makes it less remarkable that Fischelowitz should have given me the doll at once."

"Of course, of course!" exclaimed the Cossack, anxious to appear credulous out of kindness. "Fischelowitz knows as well as you do yourself how safe you are to get the money to-morrow."

"Naturally," replied the Count, with great calmness. "But besides that, the Gigerl is broken—badly broken in the middle, and the musical box is spoiled too."

"Fischelowitz must have been very angry," observed Dumnoff.

"Not at all. It was his wife. 'Akulina knocked it from the counter into the farthest corner of the shop."

"Tell us all about it," said Schmidt, more interested than ever.

"Ah, that—that is quite another matter," answered the Count, reddening perceptibly as he remembered Akulina's furious abuse.

"If you do not, I have no doubt that she will," said Dumnoff, taking another sip. "She always gives the news of you, before you come in the morning, before we have made our first hundred."

The Count grew redder still, the angry colour mantling in his lean cheeks. He hesitated a moment, and then made up his mind.

"If that is likely to happen," he cried, "I had better tell you the truth myself, instead of giving her an opportunity of distorting it."

"Much better," said the Cossack, eagerly. "One can believe you better than her."

"That is true, at all events," chimed in Dumnoff, who was only brutal and never malicious.

"Well, it happened in this way. Fischelowitz and I were talking of to-morrow, I think, when she came in from the back shop, having overheard something we had been saying. Of course she immediately took advantage of my presence to exercise her wit upon me, a proceeding to which I have grown accustomed, seeing that she is only a woman. Then Fischelowitz told her to choose her language, and that started her afresh. It was rather a fine specimen of chosen language that she

gave us, for she has a good command of our beautiful mother-tongue. She found very strong words, and she said among other things that it was my fault that her husband had got a Wiener Gigerl for fifty marks of good money. And then Fischelowitz, in his easy way and while she was talking, wound the doll up and set it before him on the counter and smiled at it. But she went on, worse than before, and called me everything under the sun. Of course I could do nothing but wait until she had finished, for I could not beat her, and I would not let her think that she could drive me away by mere talk, bad as it was."

"What did she call you?" asked Dumnoff, with a grin.

"She called me a good-for-nothing," said the Count, reddening with anger again, so that the veins stood out on his throat above his collar. "And she called me, I think, an adventurer."

"Is that all?" laughed Dumnoff. "I have been called by worse names than that in my time!"

"I have not," answered the Count, with sudden coolness. "However, between me and Fischelowitz and the Gigerl, she grew so angry that she struck the only one of us three against whom she dared lift hand. That member of the company chanced to be the unfortunate doll. And then I promised that to-morrow I would pay the money, and I made Fischelowitz give it to me in a piece of newspaper, and there it is."

"What a terrible smash there must have been in the shop!" said Dumnoff. "I would like to have seen the lady's face."

In their Russian speech, the difference between the original social standing of the three men who now worked as equals, was well defined by their way of speaking of Fischelowitz's wife. To Dumnoff, mujik by origin and by nature, she was "barina," the town "lady," to the Cossack she was "chosjaika," the "mistress," the wife of the "patron"—to the Count she was Akulina, and when he addressed her he called her Akulina Feodorovna, adding the derivative of her father's name in accordance with the universal Russian custom.

"Let us see the doll," said Schmidt, still curious. The Count, whose eating had been interrupted by the telling of his story, pushed the parcel towards the Cossack with one hand, while using his fork with the other.

Johann Schmidt carefully unwrapped the newspaper and exposed the unfortunate Gigerl to view. Then with both hands he set it up before him, raising the limp figure from the waist, and trying to put it into position, until it almost recovered something of its old look of insolence, though the eye-glass was broken and the little white hat sadly battered. The three men contemplated it in silence, and the other guests turned curious glances towards it. Dumnoff, as usual, laughed hoarsely.

"Rather the worse for wear," he observed.

"Kreuzmillionendonnerwetter! That is my Gigerl!" roared a deep German voice across the room.

The three Russians started and looked round quickly. One of the porters, a burly man with an angry scowl

on his honest face, was already on his legs and was striding towards the table.

"That is my Gigerl!" he repeated, laying one heavy hand upon the board, and thrusting the forefinger of the other under the doll's nose.

Dumnoff stared at him with an expression which showed that he did not in the least understand what was happening. Johann Schmidt's keen black eyes looked wonderingly from the porter to the Count, while the latter leaned back in his chair, contemplating the angry man with a calm surprise which proved how little faith he placed in the assertion of possession.

"You are under a mistake," he said, with great politeness. "This doll is the property of Herr Fischelowitz, the well-known tobacconist, and has stood in the window of his shop nearly four months. These gentlemen"—he waved his hand towards his two companions—"are well aware of the fact and can vouch——"

"That is all the same to me," interrupted the porter. "This is the Gigerl which was stolen from me on New Year's eve ——"

"I repeat," said the Count, with dignity, "that you are altogether mistaken. I will trouble you to leave us in peace and to make no more disturbance, where you are evidently in error."

His coolness exasperated the porter, who seemed very sure of what he asserted.

"That is what we shall see," he retorted in a menacing tone. "Meanwhile it does not occur to me to

leave you in peace and to make no more trouble. I tell you that this Gigerl was stolen from me on New Year's eve. I know it well enough, for I had to pay for it."

"How can you prove that this is the one?" inquired the Cossack, who was beginning to lose his temper.

"You have nothing to say about it," said the porter, sharply. "I have to do with this man"—he pointed down at the Count—"who has brought the doll here, and pretends to know where it comes from."

"Kerl!" exclaimed the Count, angrily. "Fellow! I am not accustomed to being called 'man,' or to having my word doubted. You had better be civil."

"Then it is high time that you grew used to it," returned the porter, growing more and more excited. "The police do not overwhelm fellows of your kind with politeness."

"Fellows?" cried the Count, losing his self-control altogether at being called by the name he had just applied to the porter. Without a moment's hesitation, he sprang from his chair, upsetting it behind him, and took the burly German by the throat.

"Call a policeman, Anton!" shouted the latter to one of his companions, as he closed with his antagonist.

The two other porters had risen from their places as soon as the Count had laid his hands on their friend, and the one who answered to the name of Anton promptly trotted towards the door, his heavy tread making the whole room shake as he ran. The other came up quickly and attacked the Count from behind,

when Dumnoff, aroused at last to the pleasant consciousness that a real fight was going on, brought down his clenched fist with such earnestness of purpose on the top of the second porter's crown that the latter reeled backwards and fell across the Count's chair in an attitude rendered highly uncomfortable by the fact that the said chair had been turned upside down at the beginning of the contest. Having satisfied himself that the blow had taken effect, Dumnoff proceeded to the other side of the field of battle, avoiding the quickly moving bodies of the Count and the porter as they wrestled with each other, and the mujik prepared to deal another sledge-hammer blow, in all respects comparable with the first. A pleasant smile beamed and spread over his broad, bony face as he lifted his fist, and it is comparatively certain that he would have put an effectual end to the struggle, had not Schmidt interfered with the execution of his amiable intentions by catching his arm in mid-air. Even the Cossack's wiry strength could not arrest the descent of the tremendous fist, but he succeeded at least in diverting it from its aim, so that it took effect in the middle of the porter's back, knocking most of the wind out of the man's body and causing a diversion favourable to the Count's security. Schmidt sprang in and separated the combatants.

"There has been enough dancing already," he said, coolly, as he faced the porter, who was gasping for breath. "But if you have not danced enough, I shall be happy to take a turn with you round the room."

The poor Count would, indeed, have been no match for his adversary without the assistance of his friends. He possessed that sort of courage which, when stung into activity by an insult, takes no account whatever of the consequences, and his thin frame was animated by very excitable nerves. But an exceedingly lean diet, and the habit of sitting during many hours in a close atmosphere, rolling tobacco with his fingers, did not constitute such a physical training as to make him a match for a rough fellow whose occupation consisted in tramping long distances and up and down long flights of stairs from morning till night, loaded with more or less heavy burdens. He was now very pale and his heart beat painfully as he endeavored instinctively to smooth his long frock-coat, from which a button had been torn out by the roots in a very apparent place, and to settle his starched collar, which at the best of times owed its stability to the secret virtues of a pin, and which at present had made a quarter of a revolution upon itself, so that the stiffly starched corners, the Count's chief coquetry and pride, had established themselves in an unseemly manner immediately below the left ear.

Meanwhile, the little restaurant was in an uproar. The host, a thin, pale man in an apron and a shabby embroidered cap, had suddenly appeared from the depths of the taproom, accompanied by his wife, a monstrous, red-faced creature clothed in a grey flannel frock. The porter whom Dumnoff had felled, and who was not altogether stunned, was kicking violently in

the attempt to gain his feet among the fallen chairs, a dozen people had come in from the street at the noise of the fight and stood near the door, phlegmatically watching the proceedings, and the poor old woman from the country, who had been supping in the corner, had got her basket on her knees, holding its handle tightly in one hand and with the other grasping her half-finished glass of beer, in terror lest some accident should cause the precious liquid to be spilled, but not calm enough to put it in a place of safety by the simple process of swallowing.

"They are foreigners," remarked some one in the crowd at the door.

"They are probably Bohemian journeymen," said a tinman who stood in front of the others. "It serves them right for interfering with an honest porter." The Bohemian journeymen are detested in Munich on account of their willingness to work for low prices, which perhaps accounted for the tinman's readiness to consider the strangers as worsted in the contest.

"We Germans fear God, and nothing else in the world," observed a mealy faced shoemaker, quoting Prince Bismarck's famous speech.

The man who had wrestled with the Count seemed to have resigned himself to the course of awaiting the police, and leaned back against the table behind him, with folded arms, glaring at the Cossack, while the Count was vainly attempting to recover possession of the pin which had fastened his collar, and which he evidently suspected of having slipped down his back,

with the total depravity peculiar to all inanimate things when they are most needed. But the second porter, having broken the chair, upset a table covered with unused saucers for beer glasses, and otherwise materially contributed to swell the din and increase the already considerable havoc, had regained his feet and lost no time in making for Dumnoff. The Russian, enchanted at the prospect of a renewal of hostilities so unfortunately interrupted, met the newcomer half-way, and, each embracing the other with cheerful alacrity, the two heavy men began to stamp and turn round and round with each other like a couple of particularly awkward bears attempting to waltz together. They were very evenly matched for a wrestling bout, for although the German was by a couple of inches the taller of the two, the Russian had the advantage in breadth of shoulder and length of arm, as well as in the enormous strength of his back. The Cossack, having assured himself that there was to be fair-play, watched the proceedings with evident interest, while the pale-faced host shambled round and round the room, imploring the combatants to respect the reputation of his house and to desist, while keeping himself at a safe distance from possible collision with the bodies of the two, as they staggered and strained, and reeled and whirled about.

The Count at last abandoned the search for the lost pin, and having pulled the front of his collar into a more normal position trusted to luck to keep it there. The table at which the three had originally sat had

miraculously escaped upsetting, and on it lay the poor Gigerl, stretched at full length on its back, calm and smiling in the midst of the noise and confusion, like the corpse at an Irish wake after the whiskey has begun to take effect.

The Count now thought it necessary to justify the unfortunate situation in which he found himself, in the judgment of the spectators.

"Gentlemen," he began, very earnestly and with a dignified gesture, "I feel it necessary to explain the truth of this ——" But he was interrupted by the arrival of a policeman, who pushed his way through the crowd.

CHAPTER V

"What is this row?" inquired the policeman in his official voice, as he marched into the room.

The man who was wrestling with Dumnoff was a German and a soldier. At the authoritative words he relaxed his hold and made an effort to free himself, a movement of which the Russian instantly took advantage by throwing his adversary heavily, upsetting another table and thereby bringing the confusion to its crisis. How far he would have gone if he had been left to himself is uncertain, for the sudden appearance of two more men in green coats, helmets and gold collars so emboldened the spectators of the fight that they advanced in a body just as Dumnoff threw himself upon the first policeman. The Russian's red face was wet with perspiration, his small eyes were gleaming ferociously and his thick hair hung in tangled locks over his forehead, producing with his fair beard the appearance of a wild animal's mane. But for the timely assistance of his colleagues, the representative of the law and, most likely, the majority of the spectators, would have found themselves in the street in an exceedingly short space of time. But Dumnoff yielded to the inevitable; a couple of well-planted blows delivered by the rescuing party on the sides of his thick skull made him shake his

head as a cat does when its nose is sprinkled with water, and the mujik reluctantly relinquished the struggle. At the same time the porter who had claimed the doll came forward and touched his bare head with a military salute.

"What is your name?" asked the first policeman, anxious to get to business.

"Jacob Goggelmann, Dienstmann number 87, formerly private in the Fourth Artillery, lately messenger in the Thüringer Doll Manufactory."

"Very good," said the policeman, anxious to take the side of his countryman from the first, and certainly justified in doing so by the circumstances. "And what is your complaint?"

"That doll, there, on the table," said the porter, "was stolen from me on New Year's eve, and now that man"—he pointed to the Count, who stood stiffly looking on—"that man has got possession of it."

"And who stole it from you?" inquired the policeman with that acuteness in the art of cross-examination for which the police are in all countries so justly famous.

"Ja, Herr Wachtmeister, if I had known that ——" suggested the porter.

"Of course, of course," interrupted the other. "That man stole the doll from you, you say?"

"Somebody stole it with my basket, as I stopped to drink a measure in the yard of the Hofbräuhaus, and I had to pay for it out of my caution money, and I lost my place into the bargain, and there lies the accursed thing."

The policeman, apparently quite satisfied with the porter's story, turned upon the Count with a blustering and overbearing manner.

"Now, then," he said roughly, "give an account of yourself. Who are you and what are you doing here? But that is a foolish question; I know already that you are a Bohemian and a journeyman tinker."

"A Bohemian? And a journeyman tinker?" repeated the Count, almost speechless with anger for a moment. "I am neither," he added, endeavouring to control himself, and settling his refractory collar with one hand. "I am a Russian gentleman."

"A gentleman—and a Russian," said the policeman, slowly, as though putting no faith in the first statement and very little in the second. "I think I can provide you with a lodging for the night," he added, facetiously.

"Slip past me, jump out of the window and run!" whispered the Cossack in the Count's ear, in Russian.

"What are you saying in your infernal language?" asked the official.

"My friend advised me to run away," said the Count, coolly sitting down, as though he were master of the situation. "Unfortunately for me, I was not taught to use my legs in that way when I was a boy."

"I was," said the Cossack. "Good-evening, Master Policeman." He took his hat from the peg on the wall where it had hung undisturbed throughout the confusion, and bowing gravely to the man in uniform made as though he would go out of the room.

"So, so, not quite so fast, my friend," said the policeman, putting himself in the way. "Heigh! heigh! Stop him! Don't let him go," he bawled, a second later.

Schmidt had paused a minute, watching his opportunity, then, taking a quick step backwards, he had vaulted through the open window with the agility of a cat, and was flying down the empty street at the speed only attainable by that deceptive domestic animal when pressed for time and anxious for its own safety.

"Sobáka!" growled Dumnoff, disgusted at his companion's defection.

"Either talk in a language that human beings can understand, or do not talk at all," said one of the two men who guarded him.

Seeing that pursuit was useless, the spokesman of the police turned to the Count, twice as blustering and terrible as before.

"This settles the question," he said. "To the police station you go, you and your bear-man of an accomplice. Potzbombardendonnerwetter! You Sappermentskerls! I will teach you to resist the police, to steal dolls and to jump out of windows! Now then, right about face—march!"

The Count did not sir from his chair. Dumnoff looked at him as though to ask instructions of a superior.

"If you can manage one of them, I can take these two," he said in Russian. Suiting the action to the

word, he suddenly bent down, slipped his arms round the legs of the two policemen, hurled them simultaneously head over heels and then charged the crowd, head downwards, upsetting every one who came in his way, and bursting into the street by sheer superior weight and impetus. An instant later, his shock head appeared at the window through which the Cossack had escaped.

"Come along!" he shouted to the Count, in his own language. "I have locked the street door and they cannot get out. Jump through the window."

"Go, my friend," answered the Count, calmly. "I will not run away."

"You had much better come," insisted Dumnoff, apparently indifferent to the noise of the crowd as it tried to force open the closed door, and shaking off two or three men who had made their way out into the street with him. He held the key in one hand, and his assailants had small chance of getting it away.

"You will not come?" he repeated. But the Count shook his head, within the room.

"Then I will not run away either," said Dumnoff, the good side of his dull nature showing itself at last. With the utmost indifference to consequences he returned to the door, unlocked it, and strode through the midst of the people, who made way readily enough before him, after their late painful experience of his manner of making way for himself.

"I have changed my mind," he said, in German, quietly placing himself between his late keepers, who

were alternately rubbing themselves and brushing the dust off each other's clothes after their tumble.

In the astonished silence which succeeded Dumnoff's return, the Count's voice was heard again.

"I am both anxious and ready to explain everything, if you will do me the civility to listen," he said. "The doll is the property of Herr Fischelowitz, the well-known tobacconist ——"

"We shall see presently what you have to say for yourself," interrupted the policeman. "We have had enough of these devilish fellows. Come, put them in handcuffs and off with them. And you three gentlemen," he added, turning to the three porters, "will have the goodness to accompany us to the station, in order to give your evidence."

"But my furniture and my beer saucers!" exclaimed the pallid host, suddenly remembering his losses. "Who is to pay for them?"

The Count answered the question for him.

"You, Master Host, who know us and have had our regular custom for years, but who have not dared to say a word in our defence throughout this disgraceful affair, you, I say, deserve to lose all that you have lost. Nevertheless, I can assure you that I will myself pay for what has been broken."

The host was not much consoled by this magnanimous promise, which was received with jeers by the crowd. There was no time, however, to discuss the question. Dumnoff had quietly submitted his two huge fists to the handcuffs and a second pair was

produced, to fit the Count. At this indignity he drew himself up proudly.

"Have I resisted the authority, or attempted to run away?" he inquired with flashing eyes.

The policeman had nothing to say to this very just question.

"Then I advise you to consider what you are doing. In spite of my appearance, which, I admit, is at present somewhat disorderly, I am a Russian nobleman, as you will discover so soon as I am submitted to a properly conducted examination in the presence of your officers. I have not the least intention of running away, and if this doll was stolen, I was not connected in any way with the theft. Since I respect the authorities, I insist upon being respected by them, and if I am treated in a degrading manner in spite of my protests, there are those in Munich who will bring the case to proper notice in my own country. I am ready to accompany you quietly wherever you choose to show me the way."

Something in his manner impressed the officials with the possible truth of his words. They looked at each other and nodded.

"Very well," said the one who was conducting the arrest.

"Moreover," said the Count, "I crave permission to carry myself the object of contention, until the other claimant has established his right of possession."

So saying the Count took the broken Gigerl from the table where it lay, and carrying it upon his hands

before him, like a baby, he solemnly walked in the direction of the door, thus heading the procession, which was accompanied into the street by the idlers who had collected inside.

"God be thanked," said the old woman in the corner, devoutly, "I have yet my beer!"

"And to think that only one of them has paid for his supper," moaned the pale-faced innkeeper, sitting down upon a chair and contemplating the wreck of his belongings with a haggard eye. The "Gigerl-night" was remembered for many a long year in the "Green Wreath Inn."

At the police station the arresting party told their own story in their own way, very much to the disadvantage of the Russians and very much in favor of the porters and the officials themselves. The latter, indeed, enlarged so much upon the atrocities perpetrated by Dumnoff as to weary the superior officer. The Cossack having escaped, the policeman did not mention him. The officer glanced at Dumnoff.

"Your name?" he inquired.

"Victor Ivanowitch Dumnoff."

"Occupation?"

"Cigarette-maker in the manufactory of Christian Fischelowitz."

"Lock him up," said the officer. "Resisting the police in the execution of an arrest," he added, speaking to the scribe at his elbow.

"Your name!" he continued, addressing the Count.

"Boris Michaelovitch, Count Skariatine."

"Count?" repeated the officer. "We shall see. Occupation?"

"I have been occupied in the manufacture of cigarettes," answered the Count. "But as I was only engaged in this during a period of temporary embarrassment from which I shall be relieved to-morrow, I may be described as having no particular occupation."

The officer stared incredulously for a moment and then nodded to the scribe in token that he was to write down what was said.

"Charged with having stolen a doll, is that it?" He turned to the policeman in charge.

"Jawohl, Herr Hauptmann."

"May it please you, Herr Hauptmann, I did not say that," put in the porter, coming forward.

"Who are you?"

"The man from whom the doll was stolen. Jacob Goggelmann, Dienstmann number 87, formerly private in the Fourth Artillery, lately messenger in the Thüringer Doll Manufactory."

"When was the doll stolen?"

"Last New Year's eve," answered the porter.

"And you have not seen it until to-day?"

"No, Herr Hauptmann."

"Then how do you know it is the same one? I suppose it is not the only doll of its kind in Munich."

"I am sure of it. I was a messenger in the shop, Herr Hauptmann, and I knew everything there, just as though I had been one of the young ladies who

serve the customers. Besides, you will find my name written in pencil under the pedestal."

"That is another matter," said the officer, taking the Gigerl and holding it upside down to the gaslight. The reversing of the thing's natural position produced some mysterious effect upon the musical box, and the tune which had been so rudely interrupted by Akulina's well-aimed blow, suddenly began again from the point at which it had stopped, continuing for a few bars and then coming to an end with a sharp twang and a little click. The policemen tittered audibly, and even the captain smiled faintly in his big yellow beard. Then he knit his brows as he deciphered something which was written on the pinewood under the base.

"You should have said so at once," he observed. "Your name is there as you assert."

"It was written to show that I was to take it. I had it in a basket with other things. I put it down a moment in the yard of the Hofbräuhaus, and when I came back the basket was gone."

"And what do you know about it?" The question was addressed to the Count.

"Seeing that the porter is evidently right," said the Count, covering with his hat the point from which the button had been torn, and holding the other hand rather nervously to his throat, as though trying to keep himself from falling to pieces, "I have nothing more to say. I will not be accused of inculpating any one in this disastrous affair. I will only say that the doll has stood since early in the year in the show window

of Christian Fischelowitz, the tobacconist, who certainly had no knowledge of the way in which it was obtained by the person who brought it to him."

"He is an extremely respectable person," observed the officer. "If you can prove what you say, I will not detain you further. Have you any witness here?"

"There is Herr Dumnoff," said the Count. The officer smiled and perpetrated an official jest.

"Herr Dumnoff has given evidence of great strength, but owing to his peculiar situation at the present time, I cannot trust to the strength of his evidence."

The policeman laughed respectfully.

"Have you no one else?" asked the officer.

"Herr Fischelowitz will willingly vouch for what I say."

"At this hour, Herr Fischelowitz is doubtless asleep, and would certainly be justified in refusing to come here out of mere complaisance. I am afraid, Count Skariatine, that I must have the honour of being your host until morning."

"It is impossible to describe our relative positions with greater courtesy," answered the Count, gravely, and not taking the least notice of the officer's ironical tone. The latter looked at the speaker curiously and then suddenly changed his manner. He was convinced that he was speaking with a gentleman.

"I regret that I am obliged to put you to such inconvenience," he said, politely. "Treat the gentleman with every consideration," he added, addressing the

policeman in a tone of authority, "and let me have no complaints of unnecessary rudeness either."

"I thank you, Herr Hauptmann," said the Count, simply.

Thus was the Count deprived of his liberty on the very eve of his return to all the brilliant advantages of wealth and social station. It was certainly a most unfortunate train of circumstances which had led him by such quick stages from his parting with Vjera to the wooden bench and the board pillow of the police-station. It looked as though the Gigerl were possessed of an evil spirit determined to work out the Count's destruction, as though the wretched adventurer who had first stolen it and palmed it off upon Fischelowitz had laid a curse upon it, whereby it was destined to breed dissension and strife wherever it remained and to the direct injury of whomsoever chanced to possess it for the time being. It had been the cause of serious disaster to the porter in the first instance, it had next represented to Fischelowitz a dead loss in money of fifty marks, it had become a thorn in the side of Akulina, it had led to one of the most violent quarrels she had ever engaged in with her husband, its limp and broken form had cost much broken crockery and some broken furniture to the host of the "Green Wreath Inn," had been the cause of several ponderous blows dealt and received by Dumnoff, had produced the violent fall, upon a hard board floor, of a porter and two policemen, and had ultimately brought the Count to prison for the night. Its value had become very great, for it had been

paid for twice over, once by the man from whom it had been stolen, by the forfeiture of his caution money, and once by Fischelowitz in the sum of fifty marks lent to an adventurer; furthermore, the Count had solemnly pledged his word as a gentleman to pay for a third time on the morrow, he having in his worldly possession the sum of one silver mark and two German pennies at the time of entering into the engagement. The actual sum of money paid and promised to be paid on the body of the now ruined Gigerl, now amounted, with interest, to more than four times its original value, thus constituting one of those interesting problems in real and comparative value so interesting to the ingenuous political economist, who believes that all value can be traced to supply and demand. Now, although the Gigerl was but a single doll, the supply of him, so to speak, had been surprisingly abundant, and the demand, if represented by the desire of any one person concerned to possess him, may be represented by the smallest of zeroes. The consideration of so intricate a question belongs neither to the inventor of fiction nor to the historian of facts, and may therefore be abandoned to the political economist, who may, perhaps, be said to partake of the nature of both while possessing the virtues of neither.

The Count was in prison, therefore, on the eve of his return to splendour, and his companion in captivity was Dumnoff the mujik. They found themselves in a well-ventilated room, having high grated windows, through which the stars were visible, and dimly

lighted by a small gas flame which burned in a lantern of white ground glass. The place was abundantly, if not luxuriously, furnished with flat wooden pallets, each having at the head a slanting piece of board supposed to do duty for a pillow. Outside the open door a policeman paced the broad passage, a man taken from the mounted detachment, and whose scabbard and spurs clattered and jingled, hour after hour, as he walked. The sound produced something half rhythmical, like a broken tune in search of itself, and the change of sentinels made no perceptible difference in the regular nature of the unceasing noise.

Dumnoff, relieved of his handcuffs, stretched himself upon the pallet assigned to him, clasped his hands under the back of his head, and stared at the ceiling. The Count sat upon the edge of his board, crossing one knee over the other and looking at his nails, or trying to look at them in the insufficient light. In some distant part of the building a door was occasionally opened and shut, and the slight concussion sent long echoes down the stone passages. The Count sighed audibly.

"It is not so bad, after all," remarked Dumnoff. "I did not expect to end the evening so comfortably."

"It is bad enough," said the Count. He produced a crumpled piece of newspaper which contained a little tobacco, and rolled a cigarette thoughtfully. "It is bad enough," he repeated as he began to smoke.

"It would have been very easy to get away, if you had done like that brute of a Schmidt who ran away and left us."

"I do not think Schmidt is a brute," observed the other, blowing a huge ring of white smoke out into the dusk.

"I did not think so either. But I had arranged it all very well for you to get away—only you would not. You see, by an accident, the key was outside the door, so I kicked the people back and locked it. It would have taken a quarter of an hour for them to open it, and if you had only jumped ——"

He turned his head, and glanced at the Count's spare, sinewy figure.

"You are light, too," he continued, "and you could not have hurt yourself. I cannot understand why you stayed."

"Dumnoff, my friend," said the Count, gravely, "we look at things in a different way. It is my duty to tell you that I think you behaved in the most honourable manner, under the circumstances, and I am deeply indebted to you for the gallant way in which you came back to stand by me, when you were yourself free. In a nobler warfare, such an action would have been rewarded with a cross of honour, as it truly deserved. It is true, as well, that you were not so intimately connected with the main question at stake, as I was, since it was I who was suspected of being in possession of unlawfully gotten goods. You were consequently, I think, at liberty to take your freedom if you could get it, without consulting your conscience further. Now my position was, and is, very different. I do not speak of any personal prejudice against the mere act of

running away, considered as an immediate means of escape from disagreeable circumstances, with the hope of ultimate immunity from all unpleasant consequences. That is a matter of early education."

"I had very little early education," observed Dumnoff. "And none at all afterwards."

"My friend, it is not for you and me to enter into the history of our misfortunes. We have met in the vat of poverty to be seethed alike in the brew of unhappiness. We have sat at the same daily labour, we have shared often the same fare, but there is that in each of us which we can keep sacred from the contamination of confidence, and which will withstand even the thrusts of poverty. I mean our individual selves, the better part of us, the nobler element which has suffered, as distinguished from the grosser, which may yet enjoy. But I am wandering a little. I am afraid I sometimes do. I return to the point. For me to take advantage of your generous attempt to free me would have been to act as though I had a moral cause for flight. In other words, it would have been to acknowledge that I had committed some dishonourable action."

"It seems to me that to get away would have been the best way out of it. They would not have caught you if you had trusted to me, and if they did not catch you they could not prove anything against you."

"The suspicion would have remained, and the disgrace in my own eyes," answered the Count. "The question of physical fear is very different. I have

been told that it depends upon the nerves and the action of the heart, and that courage is greatly increased by the presence of nourishment in the stomach. The same cannot be said of moral bravery, which proceeds more from the fear of seeming contemptible in our own eyes than from the wish to seem honourable in the estimation of others."

"I daresay," said Dumnoff, who was growing sleepy and who understood very little of his companion's homily.

"Precisely," replied the latter. "And yet even the question of physical courage is very complicated in the present case. It cannot be said, for instance, that you ran away from physical fear, after giving proof of such astonishing physical superiority. Your deeds this evening make the labours of Hercules dwindle to the proportions of mere mountebank's tricks."

"Was anybody badly injured?" asked Dumnoff, suddenly aroused by the pleasing recollections of the contest.

"I believe not seriously; I think I saw everybody whom you upset get on his feet sooner or later."

"Well," said Dumnoff, with a sigh, "it cannot be helped. I did my best."

"I should think that you would be glad," suggested the Count. "You showed your prowess without any fatal result."

"Anything for a change in this dull life," grumbled the peasant, with an air of dissatisfaction.

"With such a prospect of immediate change before me, I suppose I ought not to blame your longing for

excitement. Nevertheless I consider it fortunate that nothing worse happened."

"You might take me with you to Russia," said Dumnoff, with a short laugh. "That would be an excitement, at least."

"After the way in which you have stood by me this evening, I will not refuse you anything. If you wish it, I will take you with me. I take it for granted that you are not prevented by any especial reason from entering our country."

"Not that I am aware of," laughed Dumnoff. "Do you know how I got to Germany? A gentleman from our part of the country brought me with him as coachman. One day the horses ran away in Baden-Baden, and he turned me out of the house."

"That was very inconsiderate of him," observed the Count.

"It is true that both the horses were killed," said Dumnoff, thoughtfully. "And the prince broke his arm, and the carriage was in good condition for firewood, and possibly I was a little gay—just a little —though I was so much upset by the accident that I could not remember exactly what happened before. Still ——"

"Your conduct on that particular day seems to have left much to be desired," remarked the Count with some austerity.

"It has been my bad luck to be in a great many accidents," said the other. "But that one was remarkable. As far as I can recollect, we drove into the Grand Duke's

four-in-hand on one side and drove out of it on the other. I never drove through a Grand Duke's equipage on any other occasion. It was lucky that his Serenity did not happen to be in it just at the time. There you have my history in a nutshell. As you say you will take me with you, I thought you ought to know."

"Certainly, certainly," answered the Count, vaguely. "I will take you with me—but not as coachman, I think, Dumnoff. We may find some more favourable sphere for your great physical strength."

"Anything you like. It is a good joke to dream of such a journey, is it not? Especially when one is locked up for the night in the police-station."

"It is certainly a relief to contemplate the prospect of such a change to-morrow," said the Count, his expression brightening in the gloom.

For a few moments there was silence between the two men. Dumnoff's small eyes fixed themselves on the shadowy outlines of his companion's face, as though trying to solve a problem far too complicated for his dull intellect.

"I wonder whether you are really mad," he said slowly, after a prolonged mental effort.

The Count started slightly and stared at the ex-coachman with a frightened look.

"Mad?" he repeated, nervously. "Who says I am mad? Why do you ask the question?"

"Most people say so" replied the other, evidently without any intention of giving pain. "Everybody who works with us thinks so."

"Everybody? Everybody? I think you are dreaming, Dumnoff. What do you mean?"

"I mean that they think so because you have those queer fits of believing yourself a rich count every week, from Tuesday night till Thursday morning. Schmidt was saying only yesterday to poor Vjera ——"

"Vjera? Does she believe it too?" asked the Count in an unsteady voice, not heeding the rest of the speech.

"Of course," said Dumnoff, carelessly. "Schmidt was saying to me only yesterday that you were going to have a worse attack of it than usual because you were so silent."

"Vjera, too!" repeated the Count in a low voice. "And no one ever told me—" He passed his hand over his eyes.

"Tell me"—Dumnoff began in the tone of jocular familiarity which he considered confidential—"tell me —the whole thing is just a joke of yours to amuse us all, is it not? You do not really believe that you are a count, any more than I really believe that you are mad, you know. You do not act like a madman, except when you let the police catch you and lock you up for the night, instead of running away like a sensible man."

The Count's face grew bright again all at once. In the present state of his hopes no form of doubt seemed able to take a permanent hold of him.

"No, I am not mad," he said. "But on the other hand, Dumnoff, it is my conviction that you are exceedingly drunk. No other hypothesis can account for your very singular remarks about me."

"Oh, I am drunk, am I?" laughed the peasant. "It is very likely, and in that case I had better go to sleep. Good-night, and do not forget that you are to take me with you to Russia."

"I will not forget," said the Count.

Dumnoff stretched his heavy limbs on the wooden pallet, rolled his great head once or twice from side to side until his fur-like hair made something like a cushion, and then, in the course of three minutes, fell fast asleep.

The Count sat upright in his place, drumming with his fingers upon one knee.

"It is a wonder that I am not mad," he said to himself. "But Vjera never thought it of me—and that fellow is evidently the worse for liquor."

CHAPTER VI

Johann Schmidt had not fled from the scene of action out of any consideration for his personal safety. He was, indeed, a braver man than Dumnoff, in proportion as he was more intelligent, and though of a very different temper, by no means averse to a fight if it came into his way. He had foreseen what was sure to happen, and had realised sooner than any one else that the only person who could set everything straight was Fischelowitz himself. So soon as he was clear of pursuit, therefore, he turned in the direction of the tobacconist's dwelling, walking as quickly as he could where there were many people and running at the top of his speed through such empty by-streets as lay in the direct line of his course. He rushed up the three flights of steps and rang sharply at the door.

Akulina's unmistakable step was heard in the passage a moment later. Schmidt would have preferred that Fischelowitz should have come himself, though he managed to live on very good terms with Akulina. Though far from tactful he guessed that in a matter concerning the Count, the tobacconist would prove more obliging than his wife.

"What is the matter?" inquired the mistress of the house, opening the door wide after she had recognised

the Cossack in the feeble light of the staircase, by looking through the little hole in the panel.

"Good-evening, Frau Fischelowitz," said Schmidt, trying to appear as calm and collected as possible. "I would like to speak to your husband upon a little matter of business."

"He is not at home yet. I left him in the shop."

Almost before the words were out of her mouth, Schmidt had turned and was running down the stairs, two at a time. Akulina called him back.

"Wait a minute!" she cried, advancing to the hand-rail on the landing. "What in the world are you in such a hurry about?'

"Oh—nothing—nothing especial," answered the man, suddenly stopping and looking up.

Akulina set her fat hands on her hips and held her head a little on one side. She had plenty of curiosity in her composition.

"Well, I must say," she observed, "for a man who is not in a hurry about anything, you are uncommonly brisk with your feet. If it is only a matter of business, I daresay I will do as well as my husband."

"Oh, I daresay," admitted Schmidt, scratching his head. "But this is rather a personal matter of business, you see."

"And you mean that you want some money, I suppose," suggested Akulina, at a venture.

"No, no, not at all—no money at all. It is not a question of money." He hoped to satisfy her by a statement which was never without charm in her ears. But

Akulina was not satisfied; on the contrary, she began to suspect that something serious might be the matter, for she could see Schmidt's face better now, as he looked up to her, facing the gaslight that burned above her own head. Having been violently angry not more than an hour or two earlier, her nerves were not altogether calmed, and the memory of the scene in the shop was still vividly present. There was no knowing what the Count might not have done, in retaliation for the verbal injuries she had heaped upon him, and her quick instinct connected Schmidt's unusually anxious appearance and evident haste to be off, with some new event in which the Count had played a part.

"Have you seen the Count?" she inquired, just as Schmidt was beginning to move again.

"Yes," answered the latter, trying to assume a doubtful tone of voice. "I believe—in fact, I did see him—for a moment ——"

Akulina smiled to herself, proud of her own acuteness.

"I thought so," she said: "And he has made some trouble about that wretched doll ——"

"How did you guess that?" asked Schmidt, turning and ascending a few steps. He was very much astonished.

"Oh, I know many things—many interesting things. And now you want to warn my husband of what the Count has done, do you not? It must be something serious, since you are in such a hurry. Come in, Herr Schmidt, and have a glass of tea. Fischelowitz will be at home in a few minutes, and you see I have guessed

half your story, so you may as well tell me the other half and be done with it. It is of no use for you to go to the shop after him. He has shut up by this time, and you cannot tell which way he will come home, can you? Much better come in and have a glass of tea. The samovar is lighted and everything is ready, so that you need not stay long."

Schmidt lingered doubtfully a moment on the stairs. The closing hour was certainly past in early-closing Munich, and he might miss the tobacconist in the street. It seemed wiser to wait for him in his house, and so the Cossack reluctantly accepted the invitation, which, under ordinary circumstances, he would have regarded as a great honour. Akulina ushered him into the little sitting-room and prepared him a large glass of tea with a slice of lemon in it. She filled another for herself and sat down opposite to him at the table.

"The poor Count!" she exclaimed. "He is sure to get himself into trouble some day. I suppose people cannot help behaving oddly when they are mad, poor things. And the Count is certainly mad, Herr Schmidt."

"Quite mad, poor man. He has had one of his worst attacks to-day."

"Yes," assented the wily Akulina, "and if you could have seen him and heard him in the shop this evening ——" She held up her hands and shook her head.

"What did he do and say?"

"Oh, such things, such things! Poor man, of course I am very sorry for him, and I am glad that my husband finds room to employ him, and keep him from

starving. But really, this evening he quite made me lose my temper. I am afraid I was a little rough, considering that he is sensitive. But to hear the man talk about his money, and his titles, and his dignities, when he is only just able to keep body and soul together! It is enough to irritate the seven archangels, Herr Schmidt, indeed it is! And then at the same time there was that dreadful Gigerl, and my head was splitting—I am sure there will be a thunder-storm to-night—altogether, I could not bear it any longer, and I actually upset the Gigerl out of anger, and it rolled to the floor and was broken. Of course it is very foolish to lose one's temper in that way, but after all, I am only a weak woman, and I confess it was a relief to me when I saw the poor Count take the thing away. I hope I did not really hurt his feelings, for he is an excellent workman, in spite of his madness. What did he say, Herr Schmidt? I would so like to know how he took it. Of course he was very angry. Poor man, so mad, so completely mad on that one point!"

"To tell the truth," said Schmidt, who had listened attentively, "he did not like what you said to him at all."

"Well, really, was it my fault, Herr Schmidt? I am only a woman, and I suppose I may be excused if I lose my temper once in a year or so. It is very wearing on the nerves. Every Tuesday evening begins the same old song about the fortune and letters, and the journey to Russia. One gets very tired of it in the long run. At first it used to amuse me."

"Do you think that Herr Fischelowitz can have gone anywhere else instead of coming home?" asked the Cossack, finishing the glass of tea, which he had swallowed burning hot out of sheer anxiety to get away.

"Oh, no, indeed," cried Akulina, in a tone of the most sincere conviction. "He always tells me where he is going. You have no idea what a good husband he is, and what a good man—though I daresay you know that after being with us so many years. Now, I am sure that if he had the least idea that anything had happened to the poor Count, he would run all the way home in order to hear it as soon as possible."

"No more tea, thank you, Frau Fischelowitz," said Schmidt, but she took his glass with a quiet smile and shredded a fresh piece of lemon into it and filled it up again, quite heedless of his protest. Schmidt resigned himself, and thanked her civilly.

"Of course," she said, presently, as she busied herself with the arrangements of the samovar, "of course it is nothing so very serious, is it? I daresay the Count has told you that he would not work any more for us, and you are anxious to arrange the matter? In that case, you need have no fear. I am always ready to forgive and forget, as they say, though I am only a weak woman."

"That is very kind of you," observed Schmidt, with a glitter in his eyes which Akulina did not observe.

"I guessed the truth, did I not?"

"Not exactly. The trouble is rather more serious than that. The fact is, as we were at supper, a man

at another table saw the Gigerl in our hands and swore that it had been stolen from him some months ago."

"And what happened then?" asked Akulina with sudden interest.

"I suppose you may as well know," said Schmidt, regretfully. "There was a row, and the man made a great deal of trouble and at last the police were called in, and I came to get Herr Fischelowitz himself to come and prove that the Gigerl was his. You see why I am in such a hurry."

"Do you think they have arrested the Count?"

"I imagine that every one concerned would be taken to the police station."

"And then?"

"And then, unless the affair is cleared up, they will be kept there all night."

"All night!" exclaimed Akulina, holding up her hands in real or affected horror. "Poor Count! He will be quite crazy now, I fear—especially as this is Tuesday evening."

"But he must be got out at once!" cried Schmidt, in a tone of decision. "Herr Fischelowitz will surely not allow ——"

"No, indeed! You have only to wait until he comes home, and then you can go together. Or better still, if he does not come back in a quarter of an hour, and if he has really shut up the shop as usual, you might look for him at the Café Luitpold, and if he is not there, it is just possible that he may have looked in at the Gärtner Platz Theatre, for which he often has

free tickets, and if the performance is over—I fancy it is, by this time—he may be in the Café Maximilian, or he may have gone to drink a glass of beer in the Platzl, for he often goes there, and—well, if you do not find him in any of those places ——"

"But, good Heavens, Frau Fischelowitz, you said you were quite sure he was coming come at once! Now I have lost all this time!"

Schmidt had risen quickly to his feet, in considerable anxiety and haste. Akulina smiled good-humoredly.

"You see," she said, "it is just possible that to-night, as he was a little annoyed with me for being sharp with the Count, he may have gone somewhere without telling me. But I really could not foresee it, because he is such a very good ——"

"I know," interrupted the Cossack. "If I miss him, you will tell him, will you not? Thank you, and good-night, Frau Fischelowitz, I cannot afford to wait a moment longer."

So saying Johann Schmidt made for the door and got out of the house this time without any attempt on the part of his amiable hostess to detain him further. She had indeed omitted to tell him that her last speech was not merely founded on a supposition, since Fischelowitz had really been very much annoyed and had declared that he would not come home but would spend the evening with a friend of his who lived in the direction of Schwabing, one of the suburbs of Munich farthest removed from the places in which she advised Schmidt to make search.

The stout housewife disliked and even detested the Count for many reasons all good in her own eyes, among which the chief one was that she did dislike him. She felt for him one of those strong and invincible antipathies which trivial and cunning natures often feel for very honourable and simple ones. To the latter the Count belonged, and Akulina was a fine specimen of the former. If the Count had been literally starving and clothed in rags, he would have been incapable of a mean thought or of a dishonest action. Whatever his origin had been, he had that, at least, of a nobility undeniable in itself. That his character was simple in reality, may as yet seem less evident. He was regarded as mad, as has been seen, but his madness was methodical and did not overstep certain very narrow bounds. Beyond those limits within which others, at least, did not consider him responsible, his chief idea seemed to be to gain his living quietly, owing no man anything, nor refusing anything to any man who asked it. This last characteristic, more than any other, seemed to prove the possibility of his having been brought up in wealth and with the free use of money, for his generosity was not that of the vulgar spendthrift who throws away his possessions upon himself quite as freely as upon his companions. He earned enough money at his work to live decently well, at least, and he spent but the smallest sum upon his own wants. Nevertheless he never had anything to spare for his own comfort, for he was as ready to give a beggar in the street the piece of

silver which represented a good part of the value of his day's work as most rich people are to part with a penny. He never inquired the reason for the request of help, but to all who asked of him he gave what he had, gravely, without question, as a matter of course. If Dumnoff's pockets were empty and his throat dry, he went to the Count and got what he wanted. Dumnoff might be brutal, rude, coarse; it made no difference. The Count did not care to know where the money went nor when it would be returned, if ever. If Schmidt's wife—for he had a wife—was ill, the Count lent all he had, if the children's shoes were worn out, he lent again, and when Schmidt, who was himself extremely conscientious in his odd way, brought the money back, the Count generally gave it to the first poor person whom he met. Akulina supposed that this habit belonged to his madness. Others, who understood him better, counted it to him for righteousness, and even Dumnoff, the rough peasant, showed at times a friendly interest in him, which is not usually felt by the unpunctual borrower towards the uncomplaining lender.

But Akulina could understand none of these things. She belonged by nature to the class of people whose first impulse on all occasions is to say: "Money is money." There can be no mutual attraction of intellectual sympathy between these, and those other persons who despise money in their hearts, and would rather not touch it with their hands. It has been seen also that the events connected with the Gigerl's

first appearance in the shop had been of a nature to irritate Akulina still more. The dislike nourished in her stout bosom through long months and years now approached the completion of its development, and manifested itself as a form of active hatred. Akulina was delighted to learn that there was a prospect of the Count's spending the night in the police-station, and she determined that Johann Schmidt should not find her husband before the next day, and that when the partner of her bliss returned—presumably pacified by the soothing converse of his friend—she would not disturb his peace of mind by any reference to the Count's adventures. It was therefore with small prospect of success that the Cossack began his search for Fischelowitz.

Only a man who has sought anxiously for another, all through the late evening, in a great city, knows how hopeless the attempt seems after the first hour. The rapid motion through many dusky streets, the looking in, from time to time, upon some merry company assembled in a warm room under a brilliant light, the anxious search among the guests for the familiar figure, the disappointment, as each fancied resemblance shows, on near approach, a face unknown to the searcher, the hurried exit and the quick passage through the dark night air to the next halting-place—all these impressions, following hurriedly upon each other, confuse the mind and at last discourage hope.

Schmidt did not realise how late it was, when, abandoning his search for his employer, he turned

towards the police-station in the hope of still rendering some assistance to his friend. He could not gain admittance to the presence of the officer in charge, however, and was obliged to content himself with the assurance that the Count had been treated "with consideration," as the phrase was, and that there would be plenty of time for talking in the morning. The policemen in the guard-room were sleepy and not disposed to enter into conversation. Schmidt turned his steps in the direction of the tobacconist's house for the second time, in sheer despair. But he found the street door shut and the whole house was dark. Nevertheless, he pulled the little handle upon which, by the aid of a flickering match, he discovered a figure of three, corresponding to the floor occupied by Fischelowitz. Again and again he tugged vigorously at the brass knob until he could hear the bell tinkling far above. No other sound followed, however, in the silence of the night, though he strained his ears for the faintest echo of a distant footfall and the slightest noise indicating that a window or a door was about to be opened. He wondered whether Fischelowitz had come home. If he had, Akulina had surely told him the story of the evening, and he would have been heard of at the police-station, for it was incredible that he should let the night pass without making an effort to liberate the Count. Therefore the tobacconist had in all probability not yet returned. The night was fairly warm, and the Cossack sat down upon a door-step, lighted a cigarette and waited. In spite of long years spent in the

midst of German civilisation, it was still as natural to him to sit down in the open air at night and to watch the stars, as though he had never changed his own name for the plain German appellation of Johann Schmidt, nor laid aside the fur cap and the sheepskin coat of his tribe for the shabby jacket and the rusty black hat of higher social development.

There was no truth in Akulina's statement that a thunder-storm was approaching. The stars shone clear and bright, high above the narrow street, and the solitary man looked up at them, and remembered other days and a freer life and a broader horizon; days when he had been younger than he was now, a life full of a healthier labour, a horizon boundless as that of the little street was limited. He thought, as he often thought when alone in the night, of his long journeys on horseback, driving great flocks of bleating sheep over endless steppes and wolds and expanses of pasture and meadow; he remembered the reddening of the sheep's woolly coats in the evening sun, the quick change from gold to grey as the sun went down, the slow transition from twilight to night, the uncertain gait of his weary beast as the darkness closed in, the soft sound of the sheep huddling together, the bark of his dog, the sudden, leaping light of the camp-fire on the distant rising ground, the voices of greeting, the bubbling of the soup kettle, the grateful rest, the song of the wandering Tchumák—the pedlar and roving newsman of the Don. He remembered on holidays the wild racing and chasing and the sports in the

saddle, the picking up of the tiny ten-kopek bit from the earth at a full gallop, the startling game in which a row of fearless Cossack girls join hands together, daring the best rider to break their rank with his plunging horse if he can, the mad laughter of the maidens, the snorting and rearing of the animal as he checks himself before the human wall that will not part to make way for him. All these things he recalled, the change of the seasons, the iron winter, the scorching summer, the glory of autumn and the freshness of spring. Born to such a liberty, he had fallen into the captivity of a common life; bred in the desert, he knew that his declining years would be spent in the eternal cutting of tobacco in the close air of a back shop; trained to the saddle, he spent his days seated motionless upon a wooden chair. The contrast was bitter enough, between the life he was meant to lead by nature, and the life he was made to lead by circumstances. And all this was the result in the first instance of a girl's caprice, of her fancy for another man, so little different from himself that a western woman could hardly have told the two apart. For this, he had left the steppe, had wandered westward to the Dnieper and southward to Odessa, northward again to Kiew, to Moscow, to Nizni-Novgorod, back again to Poland, to Krakau, to Prague, to Munich at last. Who could remember his wanderings, or trace the route of his endless journeyings? Not he himself, surely, any more than he could explain the gradual steps by which he had been transformed from a Don

Cossack to a German tobacco-cutter in a cigarette manufactory.

But his past life at least furnished him with memories, varied, changing, full of light and life and colour, wherewith to while away an hour's watching in the night. Still he sat upon his door-step, watching star after star as it slowly culminated over the narrow street and set, for him, behind the nearest house-top. He might have sat there till morning had he not been at last aware that some one was walking upon the opposite pavement.

His quick ear caught the soft fall of an almost noiseless footstep and he could distinguish a shadow a little darker than the surrounding shade, moving quickly along the wall. He rose to his feet and crossed the street, not believing, indeed, that the newcomer could be the man he wanted, but anxious to be fully satisfied that he was not mistaken. He found himself face to face with a young girl, who stopped at the street door of the tobacconist's house, just as he reached it. Her head was muffled in something dark and he could not distinguish her features. She started on seeing him, hesitated, and then laid her hand upon the same knob which Schmidt had pulled so often in vain.

"It is of no use to ring," he said, quietly. "I have given it up."

"Herr Schmidt!" exclaimed the girl in evident delight. It was Vjera.

"Yes—but, in Heaven's name, Vjera, what are you

doing here at this hour of the night? You ought to be at home and asleep."

"Oh, you have not heard the dreadful news," cried poor Vjera in accents of distress. "Oh, if we cannot get in here, come with me, for the love of Heaven, and help me to get him out of that horrible place—oh, if you only knew what has happened!"

"I know all about it, Vjera," answered the Cossack. "That is the reason why I am here. I was with them when it happened and I ran off to get Fischelowitz. As ill luck would have it, he was out."

In a few words Schmidt explained the whole affair and told of his own efforts. Vjera was breathless with excitement and anxiety.

"What is to be done? Dear Herr Schmidt! What is to be done?" She wrung her hands together and fixed her tearful eyes on his.

"I am afraid that there is nothing to be done until morning ——"

"But there must be something, there shall be something done! They will drive him mad in that dreadful place—he is so proud and so sensitive—you do not know—the mere idea of being in prison ——"

"It is not so bad as that," answered Schmidt, trying to reassure her. "They assured me that he was treated with every consideration, you know. Of course that means that he was not locked up like a common prisoner."

"Do you think so?" Vjera's tone expressed no conviction in the matter.

"Certainly. And it shows that he is not really suspected of anything serious—only, because Fischelowitz could not be found ——"

"But he is there—there in his house, asleep!" cried Vjera. "And we can wake him up—of course we can. He cannot be sleeping so soundly as not to hear if we ring hard. At least his wife will hear and look out of the window."

"I am afraid not. I have tried it."

But Vjera would not be discouraged and laid hold of the bell-handle again, pulling it out as far as it would come and letting it fly back again with a snap. The same results followed as when Schmidt had made the same attempt. There was a distant tinkling followed by total silence. Vjera repeated the operation.

"You cannot do more than I have done," said her companion, leaning his back against the door and watching her movements.

"I ought to do more."

"Why, Vjera?"

"Because he is more to me than to you or to any of the rest," she answered in a low voice.

"Do you mean to say that you love the Count?" inquired Schmidt, surprised beyond measure by the girl's words and rendered thereby even more tactless than usual.

But Vjera said nothing, having been already led into saying more than she had wished to say. She pulled the bell again.

"I had never thought of that," remarked the Cossack

in a musing tone. "But he is mad, Vjera, the poor Count is mad. It is a pity that you should love a madman ——"

"Oh, don't, Herr Schmidt—please don't!" cried Vjera, imploring him to be silent as much with her eyes as with her voice.

"No, but really," continued the other, as though talking to himself, "there are things that go beyond all imagination in this world. Now, who would ever have thought of such a thing?"

This time Vjera did not make any answer, nor repeat her request. But as she tugged with all her might at the brass handle, the Cossack heard a quick sob, and then another.

"Poor Vjera!" he exclaimed, kindly, and laying his hand on her shoulder. "Poor child! I am very sorry for you, poor Vjera—I would do anything to help you, indeed I would—if I only knew what it should be."

"Then help me to wake up Fischelowitz," answered the girl in a shaken voice. "I am sure he is at home at this time ——"

"I have done all I can. If he will not wake, he will not. Or if he is awake he will not put his head out of the window, which is much the same thing so far as we are concerned. By the bye, Vjera, you have not told me how you came to hear of the row. It is queer that you should have heard of it ——"

"Herr Homolka—you know, my landlord—had seen the Count go by with the Gigerl and the policemen. He asked some one in the crowd and learned the story.

But it was late when he came home, and he told us—I was sitting up sewing with his wife—and then I ran here. But do please help me—we can do something, I am sure."

"I do not see what, short of climbing up the flat walls of the house. But I am not a lizard, you know."

"We might call. Perhaps they would hear our voices if we called together," suggested Vjera, drawing back into the middle of the street and looking up at the closed windows of the third story.

"Herr Fischelowitz!" she cried, in a shrill, weak tone that seemed to find no echo in the still air.

"Herr Fischelowitz, Fischelowitz, Fischelowitz!" bawled the Cossack, taking up the idea and putting it into very effective execution. His brazen voice, harsh and high, almost made the windows rattle.

"Somebody will hear that," he observed, and cleared his throat for another effort.

A number of persons heard it, and at the first repetition of the yell, two or three windows were angrily opened. A head in a white nightcap looked out from the first story.

"What do you want at this hour of the night?" asked the owner of the nightcap, already in a rage.

"I want Herr Fischelowitz, who lives in this house," answered the Cossack, firmly.

"Do you live here? Are you shut out?"

"No—we only want ——"

"Then go to the devil!" roared the infuriated German, shutting his window again with a vicious slam.

A grunt of satisfaction from other directions was followed by the shutting of other windows, and presently all was silent again.

"I am afraid they sleep at the back of the house," said Vjera, growing despondent at last.

"I am afraid so too," answered Johann Schmidt, proudly conscious that the noise he had made would have disturbed the slumbers of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus.

CHAPTER VII

"You had better let me take you home," said Schmidt, kindly, after the total failure of the last effort.

Vjera seemed to be stupefied by the sense of disappointment. She went back to the door of the tobacconist's house and put out her hand as though to ring the bell again; then, realising how useless the attempt would be, she let her arms fall by her sides and leaned against the door-post, her muffled head bent forward and her whole attitude expressing her despair.

"Come, come, Vjera," said the Cossack in an encouraging tone, "it is not so bad after all. By this time the Count is fast asleep and is dreaming of his fortune, you know, so that it would be a cruelty to wake him up. In the morning we will all go with Fischelowitz and have him let out, and he will be none the worse."

"I am afraid he will be—very much the worse," said Vjera. "It is Wednesday to-morrow, and if he wakes up there—oh, I do not dare think of it. It will make him quite, quite mad. Can we do nothing more? Nothing?"

"I think we have done our best to wake up this quarter of the town, and yet Fischelowitz is still

asleep. No one else can be of any use to us—therefore ——" he stopped, for his conclusion seemed self-evident.

"I suppose so," said Vjera, regretfully. "Let us go, then."

She turned, and with her noiseless step began to walk slowly away, Schmidt keeping close by her side. For some minutes neither spoke. The streets were deserted, dry and still.

"Do you think there is any truth at the bottom of the Count's story?" asked the Cossack at last.

"I do not know," Vjera answered, shaking her head. "I do not know what to think," she continued after a little pause. "He tells us all the same thing, he speaks of his letters, but he never shows them to any one. I am afraid ——" she sighed and stopped speaking.

"I will tell you this much," said her companion. "That man is honest to the backbone, honest as the good daylight on the hills, where there are no houses to darken it and make shadows."

"He is an angel of goodness and kindness," said Vjera, softly.

"I know he is. Is he not always helping others when he is starving himself? Now what I say is this. No man who is as good and as honest as he is, can have become so mad about a mere piece of fancy—about an invented lie, to be plain. What there is in his story I do not know, but I am sure that there was truth in it once. It may have been a long time ago, but there

was a time once, when he had some reason to expect the money and the titles he talks of every Tuesday evening."

"Do you really think that?" asked Vjera, eagerly. Her own understanding had never gone so far in its deduction.

"I am sure of it. I know nothing about mad people, but I am sure that no honest man ever invented a story out of nothing and then became crazy because it did not turn out true."

"But you, who have travelled so much, Herr Schmidt, have you ever heard the name before—have you ever heard of such a family?"

"I have a bad memory for names, but I believe I have. I cannot be sure. It makes no difference. It is a good Russian name, in any case, and a gentleman's name, I should think. Of course I only mean that I —that you should not think that because I—in fact," blundered out the good man, "you must not suppose that you will be a real countess, you know."

"I?" exclaimed Vjera, with a nervous, hysterical laugh, which the Cossack supposed to be genuine.

"That is all I wanted to say," he continued in a tone of relief, as though he felt that he had done his duty in warning the poor girl of a possible disappointment.

"It may be true—of course, and I am sure that it once was, or something like it, but I do not believe he has any chance of getting his own after so long."

"I cannot think of it—in either way. If it is all an old forgotten tale which he believes in still—why

then, he is mad. Is it not dreadful to see? So quiet and sensible all the week, and then, on Tuesday night, his farewell speech to us all—every Tuesday—and his disappointment the next day, and then a new week begun without any recollection of it all! It is breaking my heart, Herr Schmidt!"

"Indeed, poor Vjera, you look as though it were."

"And yet, and yet—I do not know. I think that if it were one day to turn out true—then my heart would be quite broken, for he would go away, and I should never see him again."

Accustomed as she was to daily association with the man who was walking by her side, knowing his good heart and feeling his sympathy, it is small wonder that the lonely girl should have felt impelled to unburden her soul of some of its bitterness. If her life had gone on as usual, undisturbed by anything from without, the confession which now fell from her lips so easily would never have found words. But she had been unsettled by what had happened in the early evening, and unstrung by her great anxiety for the Count's safety. Her own words sounded in her ear before she knew that she was going to speak them.

"I am sure that something dreadful is going to happen," she continued ofter a moment's pause. "He will go mad in that horrible prison, raving mad, so that they will have to—to hold him ——" she sobbed and then recovered herself by an effort. "Or else—he will fall ill and die, after it ——" Here she broke down completely and stopping in the middle of the street began

crying bitterly, clutching at Schmidt's arm as though to keep from falling.

"I should not wonder," he said, but she fortunately did not catch the words.

He was very sorry for the poor girl, and felt inclined to take her in his arms and carry her to her home, for he saw that she was weak and exhausted as well as overcome by her anxiety. Before resorting to such a measure, however, he thought it best to try to encourage her to walk on.

"Nothing that one expects ever happens," he said confidently, and passing his arm through hers, as though to lead her away. "Come, you will be at home presently and then you will go to bed, and in the morning, before you are at the shop, everything will have been set right, and I daresay the Count will be there before you, and looking as well as ever."

"How can you say that, when you know that he never comes on Wednesdays!" exclaimed Vjera through her tears. "I am sure something dreadful will happen to him. No, not that way—not that way!"

Schmidt was trying to guide her round a sharp corner, but she resisted him.

"But that is the way home," protested the Cossack.

"I know, but I cannot go home, until I have seen where he is. I must go—you must not prevent me!"

"To the police-station?" inquired Schmidt in considerable astonishment. "They will not let us go in, you know. You cannot possibly see him. What good can it do you to go and look at the place?"

"You do not understand, Herr Schmidt! You are good and kind, but you do not understand me. Pray, pray come with me, or let me go alone. I will go alone, if you do not want to come. I am not at all afraid—but I must go."

"Well, child," answered Schmidt, good-humouredly. "I will go with you, since you are so determined."

"Is this the way? Are you not misleading me? Oh, I am sure I shall never see him again—quick, let us walk quickly, Herr Schmidt! Only think what he may be suffering at this very moment."

"I am sure he is asleep, my dear child. And when we are outside of the police-station we cannot know what is going on inside, whether our friend is asleep or awake, and it can do no good whatever to go. But since you really wish it so much, we are going there as fast as we can, and I promise to take you by the shortest way."

Her step grew more firm as they went on and he felt that there was more life in the hand that rested on his arm. The prospect of seeing the walls of the place in which the Count was unwillingly spending the night gave Vjera fresh strength and courage. The way was long, as distances are reckoned in Munich, and more than ten minutes elapsed before they reached the building. A sentry was pacing the pavement under the glare of the gaslight, his shadow lengthening, shortening, disappearing and lengthening again on the stone-way as he walked slowly up and down. Vjera and her companion stopped on the

other side of the street. The sentinel paid no attention to them.

"You are quite sure it is there?" asked the girl, under her breath. Schmidt nodded instead of answering.

"Then I will pray that all may be well this night," she said.

She dropped the Cossack's arm and slipped away from him; then pausing at a little distance, in the deep shadow of an archway opposite the station, she knelt down upon the pavement, and taking some small object, which was indistinguishable in the darkness, from the bosom of her frock she clasped her hands together and looked upwards through the gloom at the black walls of the great building. The Cossack looked at her in a sort of half-stupid, half-awed surprise, scarcely understanding what she was doing at first, and feeling his heart singularly touched when he realised that she was praying out here in the street, kneeling on the common pavement of the city, as though upon the marble floor of a church, and actually saying prayers—he could hear low sounds of earnest tone escaping from her lips—prayers for the man she loved, because he was shut up for the night in the police-station like an ordinary disturber of the peace. He was touched, for the action, in its simplicity of faith, set in vibration the chords of a nature accustomed originally to simple things, simple hopes, simple beliefs. Instinctively, as he watched her, Johann Schmidt raised his hat from his round head

for a moment, and if he had possessed any nearer acquaintance with praying in general or with any prayer in particular it is almost certain that his lips would have moved. As it was, he felt sorry for Vjera, he hoped that the Count would be none the worse for his adventure, and he took off his hat. Let it be counted to him for righteousness.

As for poor Vjera herself, she was so much in earnest that she altogether forgot where she was. For love, it has been found, is a great suggester of prayer, if not of meditation, and when the beloved one is in danger a little faith seems magnified to such dimensions as would certainly accept unhesitatingly a whole mountain of dogmas. Vjera's ideas were indeed confused, and she would have found it hard to define the result which she so confidently expected. But if that result were to be in any proportion to her earnestness of purpose and sincerity of heart, it could not take a less imposing shape than a direct intervention of Providence, at the very least; and as the poor Polish girl rose from her knees she would hardly have been surprised to see the green-coated sentinel thrust aside by legions of angelic beings, hastening to restore to her the only treasure her humble life knew of, or dreamed of, or cared for.

But as the visions which her prayers had called before her faded away into the night, she saw again the dingy walls of the hated building, the gilt spike on the helmet of the policeman and the shining blade that caught the light as he moved on his beat. For

one moment Vjera stood quite still. Then with a passionate gesture she stretched out both arms before her, as though to draw out to herself, by sheer strength of longing, the man whose life she felt to be her own—and at last, wearied and exhausted, but no longer despairing altogether, she covered her face with her hands and repeated again and again the two words which made up the burden of her supplication.

"Save him, save him, save him!" she whispered to herself.

When she looked up, at last, Schmidt was by her side. There was something oddly respectful in his attitude and manner as he stood there awaiting her pleasure, ready to be guided by her whithersoever she pleased. It seemed to him that on this evening he had begun to see Vjera in a new light, and that she was by no means the poor, insignificant little shell-maker he had always supposed her to be. It seemed to him that she was transformed into a woman, and into a woman of strong affections and brave heart. And yet he knew every outline of her plain face, and had known every change of her expression for years, since she had first come to the shop, a mere girl not yet thirteen years of age. Nor had it been from lack of observation that he had misunderstood her, for, like most men born and bred in the wilderness, he watched faces and tried to read them. The change had taken place in Vjera herself, and it must be due, he thought, to her love for the poor madman. He smiled to himself in the dark, scarcely understanding

why. It was strange to him perhaps that madness on the one side should bring into life such a world of love on the other.

Vjera turned toward him and once more laid her hand upon his arm.

"Thank you," she said. "I could not have slept if I had not come here first, and it was very good of you. I will go home, but do not come with me—you must be tired."

"I am never tired," he answered, and they began to walk away in the direction whence they had come.

For a long time neither spoke. At last Schmidt broke the silence.

"Vjera," he said, "I have been thinking about it all, and I do not understand it. What kind of love is it that makes you act as you do?"

Vjera stood still, for they were close to her door, and there was a street lamp at hand so that she could see his face. She saw that he asked the question earnestly.

"It is something that I cannot explain—it is something holy," she answered.

Perhaps the forlorn little shell-maker had found the definition of true love.

She let herself in with her key and Schmidt once more found himself alone in the street. If he had followed his natural instinct he would have loitered about in one of the public squares until morning, making up for the loss of his night's rest by sleeping in the daytime. But he had taken upon himself the responsibilities of marriage as they are regarded west of the

Dnieper, and his union had been blessed by the subsequent appearance of a number of olive-branches. It was therefore necessary that he should sleep at night in order to work by day, and he reluctantly turned his footsteps towards home. As he walked, he thought of all that had happened since five o'clock in the afternoon, and of all that he had learned in the course of the night. Vjera's story interested him and touched him, and her acts seemed to remind him of something which he nevertheless could not quite remember. Far down in his toughened nature the strings of a forgotten poetry vibrated softly as though they would make music if they dared. Far back in the chain of memories, the memory once best loved was almost awake once more, the link of once clasped hands was almost alive again, the tender pressure of fingers now perhaps long dead was again almost a reality able to thrill body and soul. And with all that, and with the certainty that those things were gone for ever, arose the great longing for one more breath of liberty, for one more ride over the boundless steppe, for one more draught of the sour kvass, of the camp brew of rye and malt.

The longing for such things, for one thing almost unattainable, is in man and beast at certain times. In the distant northern plains, a hundred miles from the sea, in the midst of the Laplander's village, a young reindeer raises his broad muzzle to the north wind, and stares at the limitless distance while a man may count a hundred. He grows restless from that moment, but

he is yet alone. The next day, a dozen of the herd look up, from the cropping of the moss, snuffing the breeze. Then the Laps nod to one another, and the camp grows daily more unquiet. At times, the whole herd of young deer stand at gaze, as it were, breathing hard through wide nostrils, then jostling each other and stamping the soft ground. They grow unruly and it is hard to harness them in the light sledge. As the days pass, the Laps watch them more and more closely, well knowing what will happen sooner or later. And then at last, in the northern twilight, the great herd begins to move. The impulse is simultaneous, irresistible, their heads are all turned in one direction. They move slowly at first, biting still, here and there, at the bunches of rich moss. Presently the slow step becomes a trot, they crowd closely together, while the Laps hasten to gather up their last unpacked possessions, their cooking utensils and their wooden gods. The great herd break together from a trot to a gallop, from a gallop to a breakneck race, the distant thunder of their united tread reaches the camp during a few minutes, and they are gone to drink of the polar sea. The Laps follow after them, dragging painfully their laden sledges in the broad track left by the thousands of galloping beasts—a day's journey, and they are yet far from the sea, and the trail is yet broad. On the second day it grows narrower, and there are stains of blood to be seen; far on the distant plain before them their sharp eyes distinguish in the direct line a dark, motionless object, another and then another. The race

has grown more desperate and more wild as the stampede neared the sea. The weaker reindeer have been thrown down, and trampled to death by their stronger fellows. A thousand sharp hoofs have crushed and cut through hide and flesh and bone. Ever swifter and more terrible in their motion, the ruthless herd has raced onward, careless of the slain, careless of food, careless of any drink but the sharp salt water ahead of them. And when at last the Laplanders reach the shore their deer are once more quietly grazing, once more tame and docile, once more ready to drag the sledge withersoever they are guided. Once in his life the reindeer must taste of the sea in one long satisfying draught, and if he is hindered he perishes. Neither man nor beast dare stand between him and the ocean in the hundred miles of his arrow-like path.

Something of this longing came upon the Cossack, as he suddenly remembered the sour taste of the kvass, to the recollection of which he had been somehow led by a train of thought which had begun with Vjera's love for the Count, to end abruptly in a camp kettle. For the heart of man is much the same everywhere, and there is nothing to show that the step from the sublime to the ridiculous is any longer in the Don country than in any other part of the world. But between poor Johann Schmidt and his draught of kvass there lay obstacles not encountered by the reindeer in his race for the Arctic Ocean. There was the wife, and there were the children, and there was the vast distance, so vast that it might have discouraged even the fleet-footed scourer

of the northern snows. Johann Schmidt might long for his kvass, and draw in his thin, wan lips at the thought of the taste of it, and bend his black brows and close his sharp eyes as in a dream—it was all of no use, there was no change in store for him. He had cast his lot in the land of beer and sausages, and he must work out his salvation and the support of his family without a ladleful of the old familiar brew to satisfy his unreasonable caprices.

So, last of all those concerned in the events of the evening, Johann Schmidt went home to bed and to rest. That power, at least, had remained with him. Whenever he lay down he could close his eyes and be asleep, and forget the troubles and the mean trifles of his thorny existence. In this respect he had the advantage of the others.

Vjera lay down, indeed, but the attempt to sleep seemed more painful than the accepted reality of waking. The night was the most terrible in her remembrance, filled as it was with anxiety for the fate of the man she so dearly loved. To her still childlike inexperience of the world, the circumstances seemed as full of fear and danger as though the poor Count had been put upon his trial for a murder or a robbery on an enormous scale, instead of being merely detained because he could not give a satisfactory account of a puppet which had been found in his possession. In the poor girl's imagination arose visions of judges, awful personages in funereal robes and huge black caps, with cruel lips and hard, steely eyes, sitting in solemn

state in a gloomy hall and dispensing death, disgrace, or long terms of prison, at the very least, to all comers. For her, the police-station was a dungeon, and she fancied the Count chained to a dank and slimy wall in a painful position, chilled to the marrow by the touch of the dripping stone, his teeth chattering, his face distorted with suffering. Of course he was in a solitary cell behind a heavy door, braced with clamps and bolts and locks and studded with great dark iron nails. Without, the grim policemen were doubtless pacing up and down with drawn swords, listening with a murderous delight to the groans of their victim as he writhed in his chains. In the eyes of the poor and the young, the law is a very terrible thing, taking no account of persons, and very little of the relative magnitude of men's misdeeds. The province of justice, as Vjera conceived it, was to crush in its iron claws all who had the misfortune to come within its reach. Vjera had never heard of Judge Jeffreys nor of the Bloody Assizes, but the methods of procedure adopted by that eminent destroyer of his kind would have seemed mild and humane compared with what she supposed that all men, innocent or guilty, had to expect after they had once fallen into the hands of the policeman. She was not a German girl, taught in the common school to understand something of the methods by which society governs itself. Her early childhood had been spent in a Polish village, far within the Russian frontier, and though the law in Russian Poland is not exactly the irresponsible and blood-

thirsty monster depicted by young gentlemen and old maids who traverse the country in search of horrors, yet it must be admitted by the least prejudiced that it sometimes moves in a mysterious way, calculated to rouse some apprehension in the minds of those who are governed by it. And Vjera had brought with her her childish impressions, and applied them in the present case as descriptive of the Munich police-station. The whole subject was to her so full of horror that she had not dared to ask Schmidt for the details of the Count's situation. To her, a revolutionary caught in the act of undermining the Tsar's bedroom, could not be in a worse case. She would not have believed Schmidt, had he told her that the Count was sitting in an attitude of calm thought upon the edge of a broad wooden bench, his hands quite free from chains and gyves, and occupied in rolling cigarettes at regular intervals of half an hour—and this, in a clean and well-ventilated room, lighted by a ground glass lantern. She would have supposed that Schmidt was inventing a description of such comfort and comparative luxury in order to calm her fears, and she would have been ten times more afraid than before.

It is small wonder that she could not sleep. The Count's arrest alone would have sufficed to keep her in an agony of wakefulness, and there were other matters, besides that, which tormented the poor girl's brain. She had been long accustomed to his singular madness and to hearing from him the assurance of his returning to wealth. At first, with perfect simplicity,

she had believed every word of the story he told with such evident certainty of its truth, and she had reproached her older companions, as far as she dared, for their incredulity. But at last she had herself been convinced of his madness as through the weeks, and months, and years, the state of expectation returned on Tuesday evenings, to be followed by the disappointments of Wednesday and by the oblivion which ensued on Thursday morning. Vjera, like the rest, had come to regard the regularly recurring delusion as being wholly groundless, and not to be taken into account, except inasmuch as it deprived them of the Count's company on Wednesdays, for on that day he stayed at home, in his garret room, waiting for the high personages who were to restore to him his wealth. Sometimes, indeed, when he chanced to be very sure that they would not come for him until evening, he would stroll through the town for an hour, looking into the shop windows and making up his mind what he should buy; and sometimes, on such occasions, he would visit the scene of his late labours, as he called the tobacconist's shop on that day of the week, and would exchange a few friendly words with his former companions. On Thursday morning he invariably returned to his place without remark and resumed his work, not seeming to understand any observations made about his absence or strange conduct on the previous day.

So far the story he had told Vjera had always been the same. Now, however, he had introduced a new incident in the tale, which filled poor Vjera with dis-

may. He had never before spoken of his father and brother, except as the causes of his disasters, explaining that the powerful influence of his own friends, aided by the machinery of justice, had at last obliged them to concede him a proportional part of the fortune. Fischelowitz was accustomed to laugh at his statement, saying that if the Count were only a younger son, the law would do nothing for him and that he must continue to earn his livelihood as he could. In the course of a long time Vjera had come to the conclusion, by comparing this remark with the Count's statement when in his abnormal condition, that he was indeed the son of a great noble who had turned him out of doors for some fancied misdeed, and from whom he had in reality nothing to expect. Such was the girl's present belief.

Now, however, he had suddenly declared that his father and his brother were dead. With a woman's keenness she took alarm at this new development. She really loved the poor man with all her heart. If this new addition to his story were a mere invention, it was a sign that his madness was growing upon him, and she had heard her companions discuss their comrade often enough to know that, in their opinion, if he began to grow worse, he would very soon be in the madhouse. It was bad enough to go through what she suffered so often, to see the inward struggle expressed on his face, whenever he chanced to be alone with her on a Tuesday afternoon, to hear from his lips the same assurance of love, the same offer of marriage, and to know that all would be forgotten and that his manner

to her would change again, by Thursday, to that of a uniform, considerate kindness. It was bad enough, for the girl loved him and was sensitive. But it would be worse—how much worse she dared not think—to see him go mad before her very eyes, to see him taken away at last from the midst of them all to the huge brick house in the outskirts of the city beyond the Isar.

One more hypothesis remained. This time the story might turn out true. She believed in his birth and in his misfortunes, and in the existence of his father and his brother. They might indeed be dead, as he had told her, and he would then, perhaps, be sole master in their stead—she did not know how that would be in Russia. But then, if it were all true, he must go away —and her life would be over, with its loving hope and its hopeless love.

It is small wonder that Vjera did not sleep that night.

CHAPTER VIII

Once or twice in the course of the night, the Count changed his position, got up, stretched himself and paced the length of the room. Dumnoff lay like a log upon his pallet, his head thrown back, his mouth open, snoring with the strong bass vibration of a thirty-two-foot organ pipe. The Count looked at him occasionally, but did not envy him his power of sleep. His own reflections were in a measure more agreeable than any dream could have been, certainly more so in his judgment than the visions of unlimited cabbage soup, vodka, and fighting which were doubtless delighting Dumnoff's slumbering soul.

As the church clocks struck one hour after another, his spirits rose. He had, indeed, never had the least apprehension concerning his own liberty, since he knew himself to be perfectly innocent. He only desired to be released as soon as possible in order to repair the damage done to his coat and collar before the earliest hour at which the messengers of good news could be expected at his house. Meanwhile he cared little whether he spent the night on a bench in the police-station, or on one of the rickety wooden chairs which afforded the only sitting accommodation in his own room. He could not sleep in either case, for his brain

was too wide awake with the anticipations of the morrow, and with the endless plans for future happiness which suggested themselves.

At last he was aware that the nature of the light in the room was changing and that the white ground glass of the lantern was illuminated otherwise than by the little flame within. The high window, as he looked up, was like a grey figure cut out of dark paper, and the dawn was stealing in at last.

"Wednesday at last!" he exclaimed softly to himself. "Wednesday at last!" A gentle smile spread over his tired face, and made it seem less haggard and drawn than it really was.

The day broke, and somewhere not far from the window the birds all began to sing at once, filling the room with a continuous strain of sound, loud, clear and jubilant. The soft spring air seemed to awake, as though it had itself been sleeping through the still night and must busy itself now in sending the sweet breezes upon their errands to the flowers.

"I always thought it would come in spring," thought the Count, as he listened to the pleasant sounds, and then held one of his yellow hands up to the window to feel the freshness that was without.

He wondered how long it would be before Fischelowitz would come and tell the truth of the Gigerl's story. By his knowledge of the time of daybreak, he guessed that it was not yet much past four o'clock, and he doubted whether Fischelowitz would come before eight. The tobacconist was a kind man, but a com-

fortable one, loving his rest and his breakfast and his ease at all times. Moreover, as the Count knew better than any one else, Akulina would be rejoiced to hear of the misadventure which had befallen her enemy and would in no way hurry her husband upon his mission of justice. She would doubtless consume an unusual amount of time in the preparation of his coffee, she would presumably tell him that the milkman had not appeared punctually, and would probably assert that there were as yet no rolls to be had. The immediate consequence of these spiteful fictions would be that Fischelowitz would dress himself very leisurely, swallowing the smoke of several cigarettes in the meanwhile, and that he would hardly be clothed, fed and out of the house before eight in the morning, instead of being on the way to the shop at seven as was his usual practice.

But the Count was not at all disturbed by this. The persons whose coming he expected were not of the class who pay visits at eight o'clock. It was as pleasant to sit still and think of the glorious things in the future, as to do anything else, until the great moment came. Here, at least, he was undisturbed by the voices of men, unless Dumnoff's portentous snores could be called a voice, and to this his ear had grown accustomed.

He sat down again, therefore, in his old position, crossed one knee over the other and again produced the piece of crumpled newspaper which held his tobacco. The supply was low, but he consoled himself with the belief that Dumnoff probably had some about him,

and rolled what remained of his own for immediate consumption.

He was quite right in his surmises concerning his late employer and the latter's wife. Akulina had in the first place let her husband sleep as long as he pleased, and had allowed a considerable time to elapse before informing him of the events of the previous evening. As was to be expected, the good man stated his intention of immediately procuring the Count's liberation, and was only prevailed upon with difficulty to taste his breakfast. One taste, however, convinced him of the necessity of consuming all that was set before him, and while he was thus actively employed Akulina entered into the consideration of the theft, recalling all the details she could remember about the intimacy supposed to exist between the Count and the swindler in coloured glasses, and conscientiously showing the matter in all its aspects.

"One fact remains," she said, in conclusion, "he promised you upon his honour last night that he would pay you the fifty marks to-day, and, in my opinion, since he has been the means of your losing the Gigerl after all, he ought to be made to pay the money."

"And where can he get fifty marks to pay me?" inquired Fischelowitz with careless good-humour.

"Where he got the doll, I suppose," said Akulina, triumphantly completing the vicious circle in which she caused her logic to move.

Fischelowitz smiled as he pushed away his cup, rose, and lighted a fresh cigarette:

"You are a very good housekeeper, Akulina, my love," he observed. "You always know how the money goes."

"That is more than can be said for some people," laughed Akulina. "But never mind, Christian Gregorovitch, your wife is only a weak woman, but she can take care for two, never fear!"

Fischelowitz was of the same opinion, as he, at last, took his hat and left the house. To him, the whole affair had a pleasant savour of humour about it, and he was by no means so much disturbed as Johann Schmidt or Vjera. He had lived in Munich many years and understood very well the way in which things are managed in the good-natured Bavarian capital. A night in the police-station in the month of May seemed by no means such a terrible affair, certainly not a matter involving any great suffering to any one concerned. Moreover it could not be helped, a consideration which, when available, was a great favourite with the rotund tobacconist. Whatever the Count had done on the previous night, he said to himself, was done past undoing; and though, if he had found Akulina awake when he returned from spending the evening with his friend, and if she had then told him what had happened, he would certainly have made haste to get the Count released—yet, since Akulina had been sound asleep, he had necessarily gone to bed in ignorance of the story, to the temporary inconvenience of the arrested pair.

He was not long in procuring an order for the Count's release, but Dumnoff's case seemed to be con-

sidered as by far the graver of the two, since he had actually been guilty of grasping the sacred, green legs of two policemen, at the time in the execution of their duty, and of violently turning the aforesaid policemen upside down in the public room of an eating-house. It was, indeed, reckoned as favourable to him that he had returned and submitted to being handcuffed without offering further resistance, but it might have gone hard with him if Fischelowitz had not procured the co-operation of a Munich householder and taxpayer to bail him out until the inquiry should be made. It would have been a serious matter for Fischelowitz to lose the work of Dumnoff in his "celebrated manufactory" for any length of time together, since it was all he could do to meet the increasing demands for his wares with his present staff of workers.

"And how did you spend the night, Count?" he inquired as they walked quickly down the street together. Dumnoff had made off in the opposite direction, in search of breakfast, after which he intended to go directly to the shop, as though nothing had happened.

"I spent it very pleasantly, thank you," answered the Count. "The fact is that, with such an interesting day before me, I should not have slept if I had been at home. I have so much to think of, as you may imagine, and so many preparations to make, that the time cannot seem long with me."

"I am glad of that," said Fischelowitz, serenely. "I suppose we shall not see you to-day?"

"Hardly—hardly," replied the Count, as though

considering whether his engagements would allow him to look in at the shop. "You will certainly see me this evening, at the latest," he added, as if he had suddenly recollected something. "I have not forgotten that I am to hand you fifty marks—I only regret that you should have lost the Gigerl, which I think I have heard you say afforded you some amusement. However the money shall be in your hands without delay, or with as little delay as possible. My friends will in all probability arrive by the mid-day train and will, of course, come to me at once. An hour or so to talk over our affairs, and I shall then have leisure to come to you for a few moments and to settle that unfortunate affair. Not indeed, my dear Herr Fischelowitz, that I have ever held myself responsible for the dishonest young man who wore green spectacles. I was, indeed, a loser by him myself, in an insignificant sum, and, as he turned out to be such an indifferent character, I do not mind acknowledging the fact. I do not think it can harm him if I do. No. I was not responsible for him to you, but since your excellent wife, Frau Fischelowitz, labours under the impression that I was, I am quite willing to accept the responsibility, and shall therefore discharge the debt before night, as a matter of honour."

"It is very kind of you," remarked the tobacconist, smiling at the impressive manner in which the promise was made. "But of course, Count, if anything should prevent the arrival of your friends, you will not consider this to be an engagement."

"Nothing will prevent the coming of those I expect, nor, if anything could, would such an accident prevent my fulfilling an engagement which, since your excellent wife's remarks last night, I do consider binding upon my honour. And now, Herr Fischelowitz, with my best thanks for your intervention this morning, I will leave you. After the vicissitudes to which I have been exposed during the last twelve hours, my appearance is not what I could wish it to be. I have the pleasure to wish you a very good morning."

Shaking his companion heartily by the hand, the Count bowed civilly and turned into an unfrequented street. Fischelowitz looked after him a few seconds, as though expecting that he would turn back and say something more, and then walked briskly in the direction of his shop.

He found Akulina standing at the door which led into the workroom, in such a position as to be able to serve a customer should any chance to enter, and yet so placed as to see the greater part of her audience. For she was holding forth volubly in her thick, strong voice, giving her very decided opinion about the events of the previous evening, and of the Count, considered in the first place as a specimen of the human race, and secondly, as in relation to his acts. Her hearers were poor Vjera, her insignificant companion, and the Cossack, who listened, so to say, without enthusiasm, unless the occasional foolish giggle of the younger girl was to be taken for the expression of applause.

"I am thoroughly sick of his crazy ways," she was

saying, "and if he were not really such a good workman we should have turned him out long ago. But he really does makes cigarettes very well, and with the new shop about to be opened, and the demand there is already, it is all we can do to keep people satisfied. Not but what my husband has been talking lately of getting a new workman from Vilna, and if he turns out to be all that we expect, why the Count may go about his business and we shall be left in peace at last. Indeed it is high time. My poor nerves will not stand many more such scenes as last night, and as for my poor husband, I believe he has lost as much money through the Count and his friends as he has paid to him for work, and if you turn that into figures it makes the cigarettes he rolls worth six marks a thousand instead of three, which is more than any pocket can stand, while there are children to be fed at home. And if you have anything to say to that, little husband, why just say it!"

Fischelowitz had entered the shop and the last words were addressed to him.

"Oh, nothing, nothing," he answered, beginning to bustle cheerily about the place, setting a box straight here, removing an empty one there, opening the till and counting the small change, and, generally, doing all those things which he was accustomed to do when he appeared in the morning.

Poor Vjera looked paler and more waxen than ever in her life before; so pale indeed was she that the total absence of colour lent a sort of refinement to her plain

features, not often found even in really beautiful faces. She had suffered intensely and was suffering still. From the first words that Akulina had spoken she had understood that the Count had been in the station-house all night, and she found herself reviewing all the hideous visions of his cruel treatment which she had conjured up since the previous evening. Akulina of course hastened to say that Fischelowitz had lost no time in having the poor man set at liberty, and this at least was a relief to Vjera's great anxiety. But she wanted to hear far more than Akulina could or would tell, she longed to know whether he had really suffered as she fancied he had, and how he looked after spending in a prison the night that had seemed so long to her. She would have given anything to overwhelm the tobacconist with questions, to ask for a minute description of the Count's appearance, to express her past terrors to some one and to have some one tell her that they had been groundless.

But she dared not open her lips to speak of the matters which filled her thoughts. She was so wretchedly nervous that she felt as though the tears would break out at the sound of her own voice, and at the same time she was disturbed by the consciousness that Johann Schmidt's eyes watched her closely from the corner in which he was steadily wielding his swivel knife. It had been almost natural to tell him of her love in the darkness of the streets, in the mad anxiety for the loved one's safety, in the weariness and the hopelessness of the night hours. But, now, sitting at

her little table, at her daily work, with all the trivial objects that belonged to it recalling her to the reality of things, she realised that her day-dreams were no longer her secret, and she was ashamed that any one should guess the current of her thoughts. It was hard for her to understand how she could have thus taken the Cossack into her confidence, and she would have made almost any sacrifice to take back the confession. Good he was, and honest, and kind-hearted, but she was ashamed of what she had done. It seemed to her that, besides giving up to another the knowledge of her heart, she had also done something against the dignity of him she loved. She herself felt no superiority over Johann Schmidt; they were equals in every way. But she did feel, and strongly, that the Cossack was not the equal of the Count, and she reproached herself with having made a confidant of one beneath her idol in station and refinement. This feeling sprang from such a multiplicity of sources, as almost to defy explanation. There was, at the bottom of it, the strange, unreasoning notion of the superiority of one class over another by right of blood, from which no race seems to be wholly exempt, and which has produced such surprising results in the world. Poor Vjera had been brought up in one of those countries where that tradition is still strongest. The mere sound of the word "Count" evoked a body of impressions so firmly rooted, so deeply ingrained, as necessarily to influence her judgment. The outward manner of the man did the rest, his dignity under all circumstances,

his uncomplaining patience, his unquestioning generosity, his quiet courtesy to every one. There was something in every word he spoke, in his every action, which distinguished him from his companions. They themselves felt it. He was sometimes ridiculous, poor man, and they laughed together over his carefully chosen language, over the grand sweep of his bow and his punctilious attention to the smallest promise or shadow of a promise. These things amused them, but at the same time they felt that he could never be what they were, and that those manners and speeches of his, which, if they had imitated them, would have seemed in themselves so many forms of vulgarity, were somehow not vulgar in him. Vjera, as she loved him, felt all this far more keenly than the others. And besides, to add to her embarrassment at present, there was the girl's maidenly shyness and timidity. Since she had told Johann Schmidt her secret, she felt as though all eyes were upon her, and as though every one were about to turn upon her with those jesting questions which coarse natures regard as expressions of sympathy where love is concerned. And yet no one spoke to her, nor disturbed her. There was only the disquieting consciousness of the Cossack's curious scrutiny to remind her that all things were not as they had been yesterday.

The hours of the morning seemed endless. On all other days, Vjera was accustomed to see the Count's quiet face opposite to her, and when she was most weary of her monotonous toil, a glance at him gave

her fresh courage, and turned the currents of her thoughts into a channel not always smooth indeed, but long familiar and never wearisome to follow. The stream emptied, it is true, into the dead sea of doubt, and each time, as she ended the journey of her fancy she felt the cruel chill of the conclusion, as though she had in reality fallen into a deep, dark water; but she was always able to renew the voyage, to return to the fountain-head of love, enjoying at least the pleasant, smooth reaches of the river, that lay between the racing rapids and the tumbling falls.

But to-day there was no one at the little table opposite, and Vjera's reflections would not be guided in their familiar course. Her heart yearned for the lonely man who, on that day, sat in the solitude of his poor chamber confidently expecting the messengers of good tidings who never came. She wondered what expression was on his face, as he watched the door and listened for the fall of feet upon the stairs. She knew, for she knew his nature, that he had carefully dressed himself in what he had that was best, in order to receive decently the long-expected visit; she fancied that he would move thoughtfully about the narrow room, trying to give it a feebly festive look in accordance with his own inward happiness. He would forget to eat, as he sat there, hearing the hours chime one after another, seeing the sun rise higher and higher until noon, and watching the lengthening shadows of the chimneys on the roofs as day declined. More than all, she wondered what that dreadful mo-

ment could be like when, each week, he gave up hope at last, and saw that it had all been a dream. She had seen him more than once, towards the evening of the regularly recurring day, still confidently expecting the coming of his friends, explaining that they must come by the last train, and hastening away in order to be ready to receive them. Somewhere between the Wednesday evening and the Thursday morning there must be an hour, of which she hardly dared to think, in which all was made clear to him, or in which a veil descended over all, shutting out in merciful obscurity the brilliant vision and the bitter disappointment. If she could only be with him at that moment, she thought, she might comfort him, she might make his sufferings more easy to bear, and at the idea the tears that were so near rose nearer still to the flowing, kept back only by shame of being seen.

It was a terrible day, and everything jarred upon the poor girl's nature, from Akulina's thick, strong voice, continually discussing the question of marks and pennies, with occasional allusions to late events, to the disagreeable, scratching, paring sound of the Cossack's heavy knife as it cut its way through the great packages of leaves. The mid-day hour afforded no relief, for the pressure of work was great and each of the workers had brought a little food to be eaten in haste and almost without a change of position. For the work was paid for in proportion to its quantity, and the poor people were glad enough when there was so much to do, since there was then just so much more

to be earned. There were times when the demand was slack and when Fischelowitz would not keep his people at their tables for more than two or three hours in a day. They might occupy the rest of their time as they could, and earn something in other ways, if they were able. When those hard times came poor Vjera picked up a little sewing, paid for at starvation rates, Johann Schmidt turned his hand to the repairing of furs, in which he had some skill, and which is an art in itself, and Dumnoff varied his existence by exercising great economy in the matter of food without making a similar reduction in the allowance of his drink. Under ordinary circumstances Vjera would have rejoiced at the quantity of work to be done, and as it was, her mental suffering did not make her fingers awkward or less nervously eager in the perpetual rolling of the little pieces of paper round the glass tube. Even acute physical pain is often powerless to affect the mechanical skill of a hand trained for many years to repeat the same little operation thousands of times in a day with unvarying perfection. Vjera worked as well and as quickly as ever, though the hours seemed so endlessly long as to make her wonder why she did not turn out more work than usual. From time to time the two men exchanged more or less personal observations after their manner.

"It seems to me that you work better than usual," remarked the Cossack, looking at Dumnoff.

"I feel better," laughed the latter. "I feel as though I had been having a holiday and a country dance."

"For the sake of your health, you ought to have a little excitement now and then," continued Schmidt. "It is hard for a man of your constitution to be shut up day after day as you are here. A little bear-fight now and then would do you almost as much good as an extra bottle of brandy, besides being cheaper."

"Yes." Dumnoff yawned, displaying all his ferocious white teeth to the assembled company. "That is true—and then, those green cloth policemen look so funny when one upsets them. I wish I had a few here."

"You have not heard the last of your merry-making yet," said Fischelowitz, who was standing in the doorway. "If I had not got you out this morning you would still be in the police-station."

"There is something in that," observed Schmidt. "If he were not out, he would still be in."

"Well, if I were, I should still be asleep," said Dumnoff. "That would not be so bad, after all."

"You may be there again before long," suggested Fischelowitz. "You know there is to be an inquiry. I only hope you will do plenty of work before they lock you up for a fortnight."

"I suppose they will let me work in prison," answered Dumnoff, indifferently. "They do in some places."

Vjera, whose ideas of prisons have been already explained at length, was so much surprised that she at last opened her lips.

"Have you ever been in prison?" she asked in a wondering tone.

"Several times," replied the other, without looking up. "But always," he added, as though suddenly anxious for his reputation, "always for that sort of thing—for upsetting somebody who did not want to be upset. It is a curious thing—I always do it in the same way, and they always tumble down. One would think people would learn—" He paused as though considering a profound problem.

"Perhaps they are not always the same people," remarked the Cossack.

"That is true. That may have something to do with it." The ex-coachman relapsed into silence.

"But, is it not very dreadful—in prison?" asked Vjera, rather timidly, after a short pause.

"No—if one can sleep well, the time passes very pleasantly. Of course, one is not always as comfortable as we were last night. That is not to be expected."

"Comfortable!" exclaimed the girl, in surprise.

"Well—we had a nice room with a good light, and there happened to be nobody else in for the night. It was dry and clean and well furnished—rather hard beds, I believe, though I scarcely noticed them. We smoked and talked some time and then I went to sleep. Oh, yes—I passed a very pleasant evening, and a comfortable night."

"But I thought—" Vjera hesitated, as though fearing that she was going to say something foolish. "I thought that prisoners always had chains," she said, at last.

Everybody laughed loudly at this remark, and the

poor girl felt very much ashamed of herself, though the question had seemed so natural and had been in her mind a long time. It was an immense relief, however, to know that things had not been so bad as she had imagined, and Dumnoff's description of the place of his confinement was certainly reassuring.

As the endless day wore on, she began to glance anxiously towards the door, straining her ears for a familiar footstep in the outer shop. As has been said, the Count sometimes looked in on Wednesdays, when his calculations had convinced him that his friends, not having arrived by one train, could not be expected for several hours. But to-day he did not come, to-day when Vjera would have given heaven and earth for a sight of him. Never, in her short life, had she realised how slowly the hours could limp along from sunrise to noon, from noon to sunset, never had the little spot of sunlight which appeared in the back-shop on fine afternoons taken so long to crawl its diagonal course from the left front-leg of Dumnoff's table, where it made its appearance, to the right-hand corner of her own, at which point it suddenly went out and was seen no more, being probably intercepted by some fixed object outside.

Time is the measure of most unhappiness, for it is in sorrow and anxiety that we are most keenly conscious of it, and are oppressed by its leaden weight. When we are absorbed in work, in study, in the production of anything upon which all our facilities are concentrated, we say that the time passes quickly.

When we are happy we know nothing of time nor of its movement, only, long afterwards, we look back, and we say, "How short the hours seemed then!"

Vjera toiled on and on, watching the creeping sunshine on the floor, glancing at the ever-increasing heap of cut leaves that fell from the Cossack's cutting-block, noting the slow rise in the pile of paper shells before her and comparing it with that produced by the girl at her elbow, longing for the moment when she would see the freshly made cigarettes just below the inner edge of Dumnoff's basket, taking account of every little thing by which to persuade herself that the day was declining and the evening at hand.

Her life was sad and monotonous enough at the best of times. It seemed as though the accidents of the night had made it by contrast ten times more sad and monotonous and hopeless than before.

CHAPTER IX

The Count, as Vjera supposed, had dressed himself with even greater care than usual in anticipation of the official visit, and while she was working through the never-ending hours of her weary day, he was calmly seated upon a chair by the open window in his little room, one leg crossed over the other, one hand thrust into the bosom of his coat and the other extended idly upon the table by his side. His features expressed the perfect calm and satisfaction of a man who knows that something very pleasant is about to happen, who has prepared himself for it, and who sits in the midst of his swept and garnished dwelling in an attitude of pleased expectancy.

The Count's face was tired, indeed, and there were dark circles under his sunken grey eyes, brought there by loss of sleep as much as by an habitual facility for forgetting to eat and drink. But in the eyes themselves there was a bright, unusual light, as though some brilliant spectacle were reflected in them out of the immediate future. There was colour, too, in his lean cheeks, a slight flush like that which comes into certain dark faces with the anticipation of any keen pleasure. As he sat in his chair, he looked constantly at the door of the room, as though expecting it to open

at any moment. From time to time, voices and footsteps were heard on the stairs, far below. When any of these sounds reached him, the Count rose gravely from his seat, and stood in the middle of the room, slowly rubbing his hands together, listening again, moving a step to the one side or the other and back again, in the mechanical manner of a person to whom a visitor has been announced and who expects to see him appear almost immediately. But the footsteps echoed and died away and the voices were still again. The Count stood still a few moments when this happened, satisfying himself that he had been mistaken, and then, shaking his head and once more passing his hands round each other, he resumed his seat and his former attitude. He listened also for the chiming of the hours, and when he was sure that an hour had passed since the arrival of his imaginary express train, he rose again, looked out of the window, watched the wheeling of the house swallows, and assumed an air of momentary indifference. The next ringing of the clock bells revived the illusion. Another train was doubtless just running into the station, and in a quarter of an hour his friends might be with him. There was no time to be lost. The flush returned to his cheeks as he hastily combed his smooth hair for the twentieth time, examining his appearance minutely in the dingy, spotted mirror, brushing his clothes—far too well brushed these many years—and lastly making sure that there was no weak point in the adjustment of his false collar. He made another turn of inspection round his little room,

feeling sure that there was just time to see that all was right and in order, but already beginning to listen for a noise of approaching people on the stairs. Once more he straightened and arranged the patched coverlet of Turkey red cotton upon the bed, so that it should hide the pillows and the sheets; once more he adjusted the clean towel neatly upon the wooden peg over the washing-stand, discreetly concealing the one he had used in the drawer of the table; for the last time he made sure that the chair which had the broken leg was in such close and perfect contact with the wall as to make it safely serviceable if not rashly removed into a wider sphere of action. Then, as he passed the chest of drawers, he gave a final touch to the half-dozen ragged-edged books which composed his library—three volumes of Puschkin, of three different editions, Ivan Kryloff's *Poems and Fables,* Gogol's *Terrible Revenge,* Tolstoi's *How People Live,* and two or three more, including Koltsoff, the shepherd poet, and an ancient guide to the city of Kiew—as heterogeneous a collection of works as could be imagined, yet all notable in their way, except, indeed, the guide-book, for beauty, power, or touching truth.

And when he had touched and straightened everything in the room, he returned to his seat, calmly expectant as ever, to wait for the footsteps on the stairs, to rise and rub his hands, if the sound reached him, to shake his head gravely if he were again disappointed, in short to go through the same little round of performance as before until some chiming clock sug-

gested to his imagination that the train had come and brought no one, and that he might enjoy an interval of distraction in looking out of the window until the next one arrived. The Count must have had a very exaggerated idea of the facility of communication between Munich and Russia, for he assuredly stood waiting for his friends, combed, brushed, and altogether at his best, more than twenty times between the morning and the evening. As the day declined, indeed, his imaginary railway station must have presented a scene of dangerous confusion, for his international express trains seemed to come in quicker and quicker succession, until he barely had time to look out of the window before it became necessary to comb his hair again in order to be ready for the next possible arrival. At last he walked perpetually on a monotonous beat from the window to the mirror, from the mirror to the door, and from the door to the mirror again.

Suddenly he stopped and tapped his forehead with his hand. The sun was setting and the last of his level rays shot over the sea of roofs and the forest of chimneys and entered the little room in a broad red stream, illuminating the lean, nervous figure as it stood still in the ruddy light.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed the Count, in a tone of great anxiety, "I have forgotten Fischelowitz and his money."

There was a considerable break in the continuity of the imaginary time-table, for he stood still a long time, in deep thought. He was arguing the case in his mind.

What he had promised was, to consider the fifty marks as a debt of honour. Now a debt of honour must be paid within twenty-four hours. No doubt, thought the Count, it would not be altogether impossible to consider the twenty-four hours as extending from midnight to midnight. The Russians have an expression which means a day and a night together—they call that space of time the sutki, and it is a more or less elastic term, as we say "from day to day," "from one evening to another." Rooms in Russian hotels are let by the sutki, railway tickets are valid for one or more sutki, and the Count might have chosen to consider that his sutki extended from the time when he had spoken to Fischelowitz until twelve o'clock on the following night. But he had no means of knowing exactly what the time had been when he had been in the shop, and his punctilious ideas of honour drove him to under-estimate the number of hours still at his disposal. Moreover, and this last consideration determined his action, if he brought the money too late it was to be feared that Fischelowitz would have shut up the shop, after which there would be no certainty of finding him. The Count wished to make the restitution of the money in Akulina's presence, but he was also determined to give the fifty marks directly to the tobacconist.

He saw that the sun was going down, and that there was no time to be lost. It occurred to him at the same instant that if he was to pay the debt at all, he must find money for that purpose, and although, in his own

belief, he was to be master of a large fortune in the course of the evening, no scheme for raising so considerable a sum as fifty marks presented itself to his imagination. Poor as he was, he was far more used to lending than to borrowing, and more accustomed to giving than to either. He regretted, now, that he had bound himself to pay the debt to-day. It would have been so easy to name the next day but one. But who could have foreseen that his friends would miss that particular train and only arrive late in the evening?

He paced his room in growing anxiety, his trouble increasing in exact proportion with the decrease of the daylight.

"Fifty marks!" he exclaimed, in dismay, as he realised more completely the dilemma in which he was placed. "Fifty marks! It is an enormous sum to find at a moment's notice. If they had only telegraphed me a credit at once, I could have got it from a bank—a bank—yes—but they do not know me. That is it. They do not know me. And then, it is late."

The drops of perspiration stood on his pale forehead as he began to walk again. He glanced at his possessions and turned from the contemplation of them in renewed despair. Many a time, before, he had sought among his very few belongings for some object upon which a pawnbroker might advance five marks, and he had sought in vain. The furniture of the room was not his, and beyond the furniture the room contained little enough. He had parted long ago with an old silver watch, of which the chain had even sooner found

its way to the lender's. A long-cherished ring had disappeared last winter, by an odd coincidence, at the very time when Johann Schmidt's oldest child was lying ill with diphtheria. As for clothing, he had nothing to offer. The secrets of his outward appearance were known to him alone, but they were of a nature to discourage the hope of raising money on coat or trousers. A few well-thumbed volumes of Russian authors could not be expected to find a brilliant sale in Munich at a moment's notice. He looked about, and he saw that there was nothing, and he turned very pale.

"And yet, before midnight, it must be paid," he said. Then his face brightened again. "Before midnight," but they will be here before then, of course. Perhaps I may borrow the money for a few hours."

But in order to do this, or to attempt it, he must go out. What if his friends arrived at the moment when he was out of the house?

"No," he said, consulting his imaginary time-table, "there is no train now, for a couple of hours at least."

He took up his hat and turned to go. It struck him, however, that to provide against all possible accidents it would be as well to leave some written word upon his table, and he took up a sheet of writing paper and a pen. It was remarkable that there was a good supply of the former on the table, and that the inkstand contained ink in a fluid state, as though the Count were in the habit of using it daily. He wrote rapidly, in Russian.

"This line is to inform you that Count Skariatine is momentarily absent from his lodging on a matter of

urgent importance, connected with a personal engagement. He will return as soon as possible and requests that you will have the goodness to wait, if you should happen to arrive while he is out."

He set the piece of notepaper upright, in a prominent position upon the table, and exactly opposite to the door. He did not indeed recollect that in the course of half an hour the room would be quite dark, and he was quite satisfied that he had taken every reasonable precaution against missing his visitors altogether. Once more he seized his hat, and a moment later he was descending the long flights of stairs towards the street. As he went, the magnitude of the sum of money he needed appalled him, and by the time he stepped out upon the pavement into the fresh evening air, he was in a state of excitement and anxiety which bordered on distraction. His brain refused to act any longer, and he was utterly incapable of thinking consecutively of anything, still less of solving a problem so apparently incapable of solution as was involved in the question of finding fifty marks at an hour's notice. It was practically of little use to repeat the words "Fifty marks" incessantly and in an audible voice, to the great surprise of the few pedestrians he met. It was far from likely that any of them would consider themselves called upon to stop in their walk and to produce two large gold pieces and a small one, for the benefit of an odd-looking stranger. And yet, as he hurried along the street, the poor Count had not the least idea where he was going, and if he

should chance to reach any definite destination in his erratic course he would certainly be much puzzled to decide what he was to do upon his arrival. The one thing which remained clearly defined in his shaken intelligence was that he must pay to Fischelowitz the money promised within the limit of time agreed upon, or be disgraced for ever in his own eyes, as well as in the estimation of the world at large. The latter catastrophe would be bad enough, but nothing short of self-destruction could follow upon his condemnation of himself.

A special Providence is said to watch over the movements of madmen, sleep-walkers and drunkards. Those who find difficulty in believing in the direct intervention of Heaven in very trivial matters of every-day life are satisfied to put a construction of less tremendous import upon the facts in cases concerning the preservation of their irresponsible brethren. A great deal may be accounted for by considering what are the instincts of the body when momentarily liberated from the directing guidance of the mind. It has been already noticed in the course of this story that, when the Count did not know where he was going, he was generally making the best of his way to the establishment in which so much of his time was passed. This is exactly what took place on the present occasion. Conscious only of his debt, and not knowing where to find money with which to pay it, he was unwittingly hurrying towards the very place in which the payment was to be made, and, within a

quarter of an hour of his leaving his lodging, he found himself standing on the pavement, over against the tobacconist's shop, stupidly gazing at the glass door, the well-known sign and the familiar, dilapidated chalet of cigarettes which held a prominent place in the show window. No longer ago than yesterday afternoon the little Swiss cottage had been flanked by the Wiener Gigerl, whose smart red coat and insolent face had been the cause of so much disaster and anxiety during the past twenty-four hours. The very fact that the doll was no longer there, in its accustomed place, served to remind the Count of his rash promise to pay the money and dangerously increased the excitement which already possessed him. He wiped the cold drops from his brow, and leaned for a moment against the brick wall behind him. He was dizzy, confused and tired.

The tormenting thought that was driving him recalled his failing consciousness of outer things. He straightened himself again and made a step forward, as though he would cross the street, but paused again before his foot had left the pavement. Then he asked of his senses how he had got to the place where he stood. He did not remember traversing the familiar highways and byways by which he was accustomed daily to make his way from his lodging to the shop. Every object on the way had long been so well known to him as to cause a permanent impression in his brain, which was distinctly visible to him whenever he thought of the walk in any way, whether he had

just been over the ground or not. He could not now account to himself for his being so near Fischelowitz's shop, and he found it impossible to decide whether he had come thither by his usual route or not. It was still harder to explain the reason for his coming, since the fifty marks were no nearer to his hand than before, and without them it was useless to think of entering. As he stood there, hesitating and trying to grasp the situation more clearly, it grew, on the contrary, more and more confused. At the same time the bells of a neighboring church struck the hour, and the clanging tone revived in his mind the other impression, which had possessed it all day, the impression that his friends were at that moment arriving at the railway station. The confusion in his thoughts became intolerable, and he covered his eyes with one hand, steadying himself by pressing the other against the wall.

He did not know how long he had stood thus, when an anxious voice recalled him to outer things—a voice in which love, sympathy, tenderness, and anxiety for him had taken possession of the weak tones and lent them a passing thrill of touching music.

"In Heaven's name—what is it? Speak to me—I am Vjera—here, beside you."

He looked up suddenly, and seemed to recover his self-possession.

"You came just in time, Vjera—God bless you. I ——" he hesitated. "I think—I must have been a little dizzy with the heat. It is a warm evening—a very warm evening."

He pressed an old silk pocket-handkerchief to his moist brow, the pocket-handkerchief which he always had about him, freshly ironed and smoothly folded, on the day when he expected his friends. Vjera, her face pale with distress, passed her arm through his and made as though she would walk with him down the gentle slope of the street, which leads in the direction of the older city. He suffered himself to be led a few steps in silence.

"Where are you going, Vjera?" he asked, stopping again and looking into her face.

"Wherever you like," she said, trying to speak cheerfully. She saw that something terrible was happening, and it was only by a desperate effort that she controlled the violent hysterical emotion that rose like a great lump in her throat.

"Ah, that is it, Vjera," he answered. "That is it. Where shall I go, child?" Then he laughed nervously. "The fact is," he continued, "that I am in a very absurd position. I do not at all know what to do."

Perhaps he had tried to give himself courage by the attempt to laugh, but, in that case, he had failed for the present. In spite of his words his despair was evident. His usually erect carriage was gone. His head sank wearily forward, his shoulders rounded themselves as though under a burden, his feet dragged a little as he tried to walk on again, and he leaned heavily on the young girl's arm.

"What is it?" she asked. "Tell me—perhaps I can help you—I mean—I beg your pardon," she added,

humbly, "perhaps it would help you to speak of it. That sometimes makes things seem clearer just when they have been most confused."

"Perhaps so, Vjera, perhaps so. You are a very good girl, and you came just in time. I love you, Vjera—do not forget that I love you." His voice was by turns sharp and suddenly low and monotonous, like that of a man talking in sleep. Altogether his manner was so strange that poor Vjera feared the very worst. The extremity of her anxiety kept her from losing her self-possession. For the first time in her life she felt that she was the stronger of the two, and that if he was to be saved it must be by her efforts rather than by anything he was now able to do for himself. She loved him, mad or sane, with an admiration and a devotion which took no account of his intellectual state except to grieve over it for his own sake. The belief that in this crisis she might be of use to him, strongly conquered the rising hysterical passion, and drove the tears so far from her eyes that she wondered vaguely why she had been so near to shedding them a few moments sooner. She pressed his arm with her hand.

"And I, too, I love you, with all my heart and soul," she said. "And if you will tell me what has happened, I will do what I can—if it were my life that were needed. I know I can help you, for God will help me."

He raised his head a little and again stood still, gazing into her eyes with an odd sort of childish wonder.

"What makes you so strong, Vjera? You used to be a weak little thing."

"Love," she answered.

It was strange to see such a man, outwardly lean, tough-looking, well put together and active, though not, indeed, powerful, looking at the poor white-faced girl and asking the secret of her strength, as though he envied it. But at that moment the natural situation was reversed. His eyes were lustreless, tired, without energy. Hers were suddenly bright and flashing with determination, and with the expression of her new-found will. Vjera felt that all at once a change had come over her, the weak strings of her heart grew strong, the dreamy hopelessness of her thoughts fell away, leaving one clearly defined resolution in its place. The man she loved was going mad, and she would save him, cost what it might.

That Faith, no larger than the tiniest mustard seed, but able to toss the mountains, as pebbles, from their foundations into the sea, is the determination to do the thing chosen to be done or to die—literally, to die—in trying to do it. Death is farther from most of us than we fancy, and if we would but risk all, to win or lose all, we could almost always do the deed which looks so grimly impossible. Those who have faced great physical dangers or who have been matched by fate against overwhelming odds of anxiety and trouble, alone know what great things are done when men stand at bay and face the world, and fate, and life, and death and misfortune, all banded together against them, and say in their hearts, "We will win this fight or die." Then, at that word, when it is spoken earnestly, in sin-

cerity and truth, the iron will rises up and takes possession of the feeble body, the doubting soul shakes off its hesitating weakness, is drawn back upon itself like a strong bow bent double, is compressed and full of a terrible latent power, like the handful of deadly explosive which, buried in the bosom of the rock, will presently shake the mighty cliff to its roots, as no thunderbolt could shake it.

Vjera had made up her mind that she would save the man she loved from the destruction which was coming upon him. How he was to be saved, she knew not, but then and there, on the pavement of the commonplace Munich street, she made her stand and faced the odds, as bravely as ever soldier faced the enemy's triumphant charge, though she was only a forlorn little Polish shell-maker, without much health or strength, and having very little understanding of the danger beyond that which was given to her by her love.

She fixed her eyes upon the Count's face as though she would have him obey her.

"I will help you, and make everything right," she said. "But you must tell me what the trouble is."

"But how can you help me, child?" he asked, beginning to grow calmer under her clear gaze. "It is such a very complicated case," he continued, falling back gradually into his own natural manner. "You see, my friends have probably arrived by this train, and yet I cannot go home until I have set this other matter right with Fischelowitz. It is true, I have left a word written for them on my table, and perhaps they

are there now, waiting for me, and if I went home I could have the money at once. But then—it may be too late before I get here again ——"

"What money?" asked Vjera, anxious to get at the truth without delay.

"Oh, it is an absurd thing," he answered, growing nervous again. "Quite absurd—and yet, it is fifty marks—and until they come, I do not see what to do. Fifty marks—to-day it seems so much, and to-morrow it will seem so little!" He made a poor attempt to smile, but his voice trembled.

"But these fifty marks—what do you need them for to-night?" Vjera asked, not understanding at all. "Will not to-morrow do as well?"

"No, no!" he cried in renewed anxiety. "It must be to-night, now, this very hour. If I do not pay the money, I am ruined, Vjera, disgraced for ever. It is a debt of honour—you do not understand what that means, child, nor how terrible it is for a man not to pay before the day is over—ah, if it were not a debt of honour!—but there is no time to be lost. It is almost dark already. Go home, dear Vjera, go home. I cannot go with you to-night, for I must find this money. Good-night—and then to-morrow—I have not forgotten, and you must not forget—but there is no time now—good-night!"

He suddenly broke away from her side and began walking quickly in the opposite direction, his head bent down, his arms swinging by his side. She ran after him and again took his arm, and looked into his face.

"You must not go away like this," she said, so firmly and with so much authority that he stood still. "You have only half explained the trouble to me, but I can help you. A debt of honour, you say—what will happen if you do not pay it?"

"I must die," answered the Count. "I could never respect myself again."

"You have borrowed this money of Fischelowitz and promised to pay it to-day? Is that it? Tell me."

"No—I never borrowed it. No, no—it was that villain, last winter, who gave him the Gigerl ——"

"And Fischelowitz expects you to pay that!" cried Vjera, indignantly. "It is impossible."

"When I took the Gigerl away last night I promised to bring the fifty marks by to-night. I gave my word, my word as a gentleman, Vjera, which I cannot break —my word, as a gentleman," he repeated with something of his old dignity.

"It is monstrous that Fischelowitz should have taken such a promise," said Vjera.

"That does not alter the obligation," answered the Count, proudly. "Besides, I gave it of my own accord. I did not wait for him to ask it, after his wife accused me of being the means of his losing the money."

"Oh, how could she be so heartless!" Vjera exclaimed.

"What was the use of telling you? I did not mean to. Good-night, Vjera dear—I must be quick." He tried to leave her, but she held him fast.

"I will get you the money at once," she said desper-

ately and without the least hesitation. He started, in the utmost astonishment, staring at her as though he fancied that she had lost her senses.

"You! Why, Vjera, how can you imagine that I would take it from you, or how do you think it would be possible for you to find it? You are mad, my dear child, quite mad!"

In spite of everything, the tears broke from her eyes at the words which meant so much to her and which seemed to mean so little to him. But she brushed them bravely away.

"You say you love me—you know that I love you. Do you trust me? Do you believe in me? And if you do, why then, believe that I will do what I say. And as for taking the fifty marks from me—will not your friends be here to-night, as you say, and will you not be able to give it all back very soon? Only wait here—or no, go into the shop and talk to Fischelowitz —I will bring it to you in less than an hour, I promise you that I will ——"

"But how? Oh, Vjera—I am in such trouble that I could almost bring myself to borrow it of you if you could lend it—I despise myself, but it is growing so late, and it will only be until to-morrow, only for a few hours perhaps. If you will wait to-night I may bring it to you before bedtime. But—are you sure, Vjera? Have you really got it? If I should wait here—and you should not find it—and my word should be broken ——"

"For your word I give you mine. You shall have

it in an hour." She tried to throw so much certainty into her tone as might persuade him, and she succeeded. "Where will you wait for me? In the shop?" she asked.

"No—not there. In the Café here—I am tired—I will sit down and drink a cup of coffee. I think I have a little money—enough for that." He smiled faintly as he felt in his pockets. Then his face fell. On the previous evening, when they had led him away from the eating-house, he had carelessly given all he had—a mark and two pennies—to pay for his supper, throwing it to the fat hostess without any reckoning, as he went out. "Never mind," he said, after the fruitless search. "I will wait outside."

But Vjera thrust a silver piece into his hand and was gone before he could protest. And in this way she took upon herself the burden of the Count's debt of honour.

CHAPTER X

VJERA turned her head when she had reached the corner of the street, and saw that the Count had disappeared. He had entered the Café, and had evidently accepted her assurance that she would bring the money without delay. So far, at least, she had been successful. Though by far the most difficult portion of the enterprise lay before her, she was convinced that if she could really produce the fifty marks, the approaching catastrophe of total madness would be averted. Her determination was still so strong that she never doubted the possibility of performing her promise. Without hesitation, she returned to the shop, in search of Johann Schmidt, to whose energies and kindness she instinctively turned for counsel and help. As she came to the door she saw that he was just bidding good-night to his employer. She waited a moment and met him on the pavement as he came out.

"I must have fifty marks in an hour, Herr Schmidt," she said, boldly. "If I do not get it, something dreadful will happen."

"Fifty marks!" exclaimed the Cossack in a tone of amazement. If she had said fifty millions, the shock to his financial sense could not have been more severe. "It is an enormous sum," he said, slowly, while she

fixed her eyes upon him, waiting for his answer. "What is the matter, Vjera? Have you not been able to pay your rent this year, and has old Homolka threatened to turn you out?"

"Oh, no! It is worse than that, far worse than that! If it were only myself ——" she hesitated.

"What is it? Who is it? Perhaps it is not so serious as you think. Tell me all about it.'

"There is very little time—only an hour. He is going mad—really mad, Herr Schmidt, because he has given his word of honour to pay Herr Fischelowitz that money this evening. I only calmed him, by promising to bring the money at once."

"You promised that?" exclaimed Schmidt. "It was a very wild promise ——"

"I will keep it, and you must help me. We have an hour. If we do not succeed he will never be himself again."

"But fifty marks!" Schmidt could not recover from his astonishment. "Oh, Vjera!" he exclaimed at last, in the simplicity of his heart, "how you must love him!"

"I would do more than that—if I could," she answered. "But come, you will help me, will you not? I have a ten-mark piece and an old thaler put away at home. That makes thirteen, and two I have in my pocket, fifteen and—I am afraid that is all," she concluded after a slight hesitation.

"And five are twenty," said the Cossack, producing the six which he had, and taking one silver piece out

of the number to be returned to his pocket. The children must not starve on the morrow.

"Oh, thank you, Herr Schmidt!" cried poor Vjera in a joyful voice as she eagerly took the proffered coins. "Twenty already! Why, twenty-five will be half, will it not? And I am sure that he can find the rest, then."

"There is Dumnoff," said Schmidt. "He probably has something, too."

"But I could not borrow of him—besides, if he knew it was for the Count—and he is so rough—he would not give it to us."

"We shall see," answered the other, who knew his man. "Wait a moment. He is still inside."

He re-entered the shop, where Fischelowitz and his wife were conversing under the gaslight.

"I tell you," Akulina was saying, "that it is high time you got rid of him. The new workman from Vilna will take his place, and it is positively ridiculous to be made to submit to this madman's humours and impertinence. What sort of a man are you, Christian Gregorovitch, to let the fellow carry off your Gigerl, with his airy promise to pay you the money to-day?"

"The Gigerl was broken," observed the tobacconist.

"Oh, it could have been mended; and if it was really stolen, was that our business, I would like to know? Nobody would ever have supposed, seeing it in our window, that it had been stolen. And it could have been mended, as I say, and might have been worth something after all. You never really tried to sell it,

as you ought to have done from the very first. And now you have got nothing at all, nothing but that insolent maniac's promise. If I were you I would take the money out of his wages, I would indeed!"

"No doubt you would," said Fischelowitz, with sincere conviction.

Meanwhile Schmidt had gone into the back shop, where Dumnoff was still doggedly working, making up for the time he had lost by coming late in the morning. He was alone at his little table.

"How much money have you got?" asked the Cossack, briefly. Dumnoff looked up rather stupidly, dropped the cigarette he was making, and felt in his pocket for his change. He produced five marks, an unusual sum for him to have in his possession, and which would not have found itself in his hands had not his arrest on the previous evening prevented his spending considerably more than he had spent on his favourite corn-brandy.

"I want it all," said Schmidt.

"You are a cool-blooded fellow," laughed Dumnoff, making as though he would return the coins to his pocket.

"Look here, Dumnoff," answered the Cossack, his bright eyes gleaming. "I want that money. You know me, and you had better give it to me without making any trouble."

Dumnoff seemed confused by the sharpness of the demand, and hesitated.

"You seem in a great hurry," he said, with an awk-

ward laugh, "I suppose you mean to give it back to me?"

"You shall have it at the rate of a mark a day in the next five work days. You will get your pay this evening, and that will be quite enough for you to get drunk with to-night."

"That is true," said Dumnoff, thoughtfully. "Well, take it," he added, slipping the money into the other's outstretched palm.

"Thank you," said the Cossack. "You are not so bad as you look, Dumnoff. Good-night." He was gone in a moment.

Dumnoff stared at the door through which he had disappeared.

"After all," he muttered, discontentedly, "he could not have taken it by force. I wonder why I was such a fool as to give it to him!"

"I tell you," said Akulina to her husband as Schmidt passed through the outer shop, "that he will end by costing us so much in money lent, and squandered in charity, that the business will go to dust and feathers! I am only a weak woman, Christian Gregorovitch, but I have four children ——"

The Cossack heard no more, for he closed the street door behind him and returned to Vjera's side. She was standing as he had left her, absorbed in the contemplation of the financial crisis.

"Five more," said he, giving her the silver. "That is one half. Now for the other. But are you quite sure, Vjera, that it is as bad as you think? I know

that Fischelowitz does not in the least expect the money."

"No—I daresay not. But I know this, if I had not met him just now and promised to bring him the fifty marks, he would have been raving mad before morning." Schmidt saw by her look that she was convinced of the fact.

"Very well," he said. "I am not going to turn back now. The poor Count has done me many a good turn in his time, and I will do my best, though I do not exactly see what more I can do, at such short notice."

"Have you got anything worth pawning, Herr Schmidt?" asked Vjera, ruthless, as devoted people can be when the object of their devotion is in danger.

"Well—I have not much that I can spare. There is the bed—but my wife cannot sleep on the floor, though I would myself. And there are a few pots and pans in the kitchen—not worth much, and I do not know what we should do without them. I do not know, I am sure. I cannot take the children's things, Vjera, even for you."

"No," said Vjera, doubtfully. "I suppose not. Of course not!" she exclaimed, immediately afterwards, with an attempt to express conviction.

"There is one thing—there is the old samovar," continued the Cossack. "It has a leak in one side, and we make the tea as we can, when we have any. But I remember that I once pawned it, years ago, for five marks."

"That would make thirty," said Vjera, promptly.

"I do not believe they would lend so much on it now, though it is good metal. It is a little battered, besides being leaky."

"Let us get it," said Vjera, beginning to walk briskly on. I have something, too, though I do not know what it is worth. It is an old skin of a wolf—my father killed it inside the village, just before we came away."

"A wolf skin!" exclaimed Schmidt. "That may be worth something, if it is good."

"I am afraid it is not very good," answered Vjera, doubtfully. "The hair comes out. I think it must have been a mangy wolf. And there is a bad hole on one side."

"It was probably badly cured," said the Cossack, who understood furs. "But I can mend the hole in five minutes, so that nobody will see it."

"We will get it, too. But I am afraid that it will not be nearly enough to make up the twenty-five marks. They could not possibly give us twenty marks for the skin, could they?"

"No, indeed, unless you could sell it to some one who does not understand those things. And the samovar will not bring five, as I said. We must find something else."

"Let us get the samovar first," said Vjera, decisively. "I will wait downstairs till you get it, and then you will wait for me where I live, and after that we will go together. I may find something else. Indeed, I must, or we shall not have enough."

They walked rapidly through the deepening shadows towards Schmidt's home. Vjera moved as people do who are possessed by an idea which must be put into immediate execution, her head high, her eyes full of light, her lips set, her step firm. Her companion was surprised to find that he needed to walk fast in order to keep by her side. He looked at her often, as he had looked all day, with an expression that showed at once much interest, considerable admiration and some pity. If he had not been lately brought to some new opinion concerning the girl he would certainly not have entered into her wild scheme for calming the Count's excitement without at least arguing the case lengthily, and discussing all the difficulties which presented themselves to his imagination. As it was, he felt himself carried away by a sort of enthusiasm in her cause, which would have led him to make even greater sacrifices than he had it in his power to offer. So strong was this feeling that he felt called upon to make a sort of apology.

"I am sorry I cannot do more to help you," he said regretfully. "It is very little, I know, but then, you see I am not alone in the world, Vjera. There are others to be thought of. And besides, I have just paid the rent, and there are no savings left."

"Dear Herr Schmidt," answered Vjera, gratefully, "you are doing too much already—but I cannot help taking all you give me, though I can thank you for it with all my heart."

They did not speak again during the next few

minutes, until they reached the door of the house in which the Cossack lived.

"I shall only need a moment," he said, as he dived into the dark entrance.

He lost so little time, that it seemed to Vjera as though the echo of his steps had not died away upon the stairs before she heard his footfall again as he descended. This time, however, there was a rattle and clatter of metal to be heard as well as his quick tread and the loud creaking of his coarse, stiff shoes. He emerged into the street with the body of the samovar under one arm. The movable brass chimney of the machine was sticking out of one of his pockets, and in his left hand he had its little tray, with the rings and other pieces belonging to the whole. Amongst those latter objects, which he grasped tightly in his fingers, there figured also the fragment of a small spoon of which the bowl had been broken from the handle.

"It is silver," he said, referring to the latter utensil, as he held up the whole handful before Vjera's eyes. "But if we can find a jeweller's shop open, we will sell it. We can get more for it in that way. And now your wolf's skin, Vjera. And be sure to bring me a needle and some strong thread when you come down. I can mend the hole by the gaslight in the street, for Homolka would not understand it if he saw me going to your room, you know."

She helped him to put all the smaller things into his pockets, so that he had only the samovar itself,

and its metal tray, to carry in his hands, and then they went briskly on towards Vjera's lodgings.

"Do you think we shall get three marks for the little spoon?" she asked, constantly preoccupied by her calculations.

"Oh, yes," Schmidt answered cheerfully. "We may get five. It is good silver, and they buy silver by weight."

A few moments later she stood still before a narrow shop which was lighted within, though there was no lamp in the windows. It was that of a small watchmaker and jeweller, and a few silver watches and some cheap chains and trinkets were visible behind the glass pane.

"Perhaps he may buy the spoon," suggested Vjera, anxious to lose no time.

Without a word Schmidt entered the shop, while the girl stood outside. In less than five minutes he came out again with something in his hand.

"Three and a half," he said, handing her the money.

"I had hoped it would be worth more," she answered, putting the coins with the rest.

"No. He weighed it with silver marks. It weighed just four of them, and he said he must have half a mark to make it worth his while."

"Very well," said Vjera, "it is always something. I have twenty-eight and a half now."

When they reached her lodging Schmidt set down the samovar upon the pavement, and made himself a cigarette while he waited for her. She was gone a

long time, as it seemed to him, and he was beginning to wonder whether anything had happened, when she suddenly made her appearance, noiseless in her walk, as always. The old wolf's skin was hung over one shoulder, and she carried besides a limp-looking brown paper parcel, tied with a bit of folded ribband. As he caught sight of her face in the light of the street lamp, Schmidt fancied that she was paler than before, and that her cheek was wet.

"I am sorry I was so long," she said. "The little sister cried because I would not stay, and I had to quiet her. Here is the skin. Do you see? I am afraid this is a very big hole—and the hair comes out in handfuls. Look at it."

"It was a very old wolf," remarked the Cossack, holding the skin up under the gaslight.

"Does that make it worth less?" asked Vjera, anxiously.

"Not of itself; on the contrary. And I can mend the hole, if you have the thread and needle. The worst thing about it all is the way the hairs fall out. I am afraid the moths have been at it, Vjera." He shook his head gravely. "I am afraid the moths have done a great deal of damage."

"Oh, if I had only known—I would have been so careful! And to think that it might have been worth something."

"It is worth something as it is, but at the pawnbroker's they will not lend much on it." He took the threaded needle, which she had not forgotten, and sit-

ting down upon the edge of the pavement spread the skin upon his knees with the fur downwards. Then he quickly began to draw the hole together, sewing it firmly with the furrier's cross stitch, and so neatly that the seam looked like a single straight line on the side of the leather, while it was quite invisible in the fur on the other.

"What is the other thing you have brought?" he inquired without looking up from his work. The light was bad, and he had to bend his eyes close to the sewing.

"It is something I may be able to sell," said Vjera, in a rather unsteady voice.

"Silver?" asked Schmidt, cheerfully.

"Oh, no—not silver—something dearer," she said, almost under her breath. "I am afraid it is very hard for you to see," she added quickly, attempting to avoid his questions. "Do you not think that I could hold a match for you, to make a little more light? You always have some with you."

"Wait a moment—yes—I have almost finished the seam—here is the box. Now, if you can hold the match just there, just over the needle, and keep it from going out, I can finish the end off neatly."

Vjera knelt down beside him and held the flickering bit of wood as well as she was able. They made a strange picture, out in the unfrequented street, the dim glare of the gaslight above them, and the redder flame of the match making odd tints and shadows in their faces. Vjera's shawl had slipped back from her

head and her thick tress of red-brown hair had found its way over her shoulder. An artist, strolling supperwards from his studio, came down their side of the way. He stopped and looked at them.

"Has anything happened?" he asked kindly. "Can I be of any use?"

Vjera looked up with a frightened glance. The Cossack paid no attention to the stranger.

"Oh, no, thank you—thank you, sir, it is nothing—only a little piece of work to finish."

The artist gave one more look and passed on, wishing that he could have had pencil and paper and light at his command for five minutes.

"There," said Schmidt, triumphantly. "It is done, and very well done. And now for the pawn-shop, Vjera!"

Vjera took the skin over her arm and her companion picked up the samovar with its tray, and they moved on again. Vjera's face was pale and sad, but she seemed more confident of success than ever, and her step was elastic and hopeful. Johann Schmidt's curiosity was very great, as has been seen on previous occasions. He did his best to control it, for some time, only trying to guess from the general appearance of the limp parcel what it might contain. But his ingenuity failed to solve the problem. At last he could bear it no longer. They were entering the street where the pawnbroker's shop was situated when his resolution broke down.

"Is it a piece of lace?" he asked at a venture. "If

it is, you know, and if it is good, it may be worth all the other things together."

"No. It is not a piece of lace," answered the girl. "I will tell you what it is, if we do not get enough without it."

"I only thought," explained the Cossack, "that if we were going to try and pawn it, I had better know ——"

"We cannot pawn it," said Vjera, decisively. "It will have to be sold. Let us go in together." She spoke the last words as they reached the door of the pawn-shop.

"I could save you the trouble," Schmidt suggested, offering to take the wolf's skin. But Vjera would not give it up. She felt that she must see everything done herself, if only to distract her thoughts from more painful matters.

The place was half full of people, most of them with anxious faces, and all having some object or other in their hands. The pawn-shops do their best business in the evening. A man and a woman, both advanced in middle age, well fed, parsimoniously washed, and possessing profiles of an outline disquieting to Christian prejudices, leaned over the counter, handled the articles offered them, consulted each other in incomprehensible monosyllables, talked volubly to the customers in oily undertones and from time to time counted out small doses of change which they gave to the eager recipients, accompanied by little slips of paper on which there were both printed and

written words. The room was warm and redolent of poverty. A broad flame of gas burned, without a shade, over the middle of the counter.

In spite of their unctuous tones the Hebrew and his wife did their business rapidly, with sharpness and decision. Either one of them would have undertaken to name the precise pawning value of anything on earth and, possibly, of most things in heaven, provided that the universe were brought piecemeal to their counter. Both Vjera and Schmidt had been made acquainted by previous necessities with the establishment. Vjera held her paper parcel in her hand. the other things were laid together upon the counter. The Hebrew woman glanced at the samovar, felt the weight of it and turned it once round.

"Leaky," she observed in her smooth voice. "Old brass. One mark and a half." Her husband put out his hand, touched the machine, lifted it, and nodded.

"Only a mark and a half!" exclaimed Vjera. "And the skin, how much for that?"

"It is a genuine Russian wolf," Schmidt put in. "And it is very large."

"Moth-eaten," said the Jewess. "And there is a hole in the side. Five marks."

Schmidt held the fur up to the light and blew into it with a professional air, as furriers do.

"Look at that!" he cried, persuasively. "Why, it is worth twenty!"

The Hebrew lady, instead of answering, extended a fat thumb and a plump, pointed forefinger, and pinch-

ing a score of hairs between the two, pulling them out without effort, and then held them close to the Cossack's eyes.

"Five marks," she repeated, getting the money out and preparing to fill in a couple of pawn-tickets.

"Make it ten, with the samovar!" entreated Vjera. The Jewess smiled.

"Do you think the samovar is of gold?" she inquired. Six and a half for the two. Take it or leave it."

Vjera looked at Schmidt anxiously as though to ask his opinion.

"They will not give more," he said, in Russian.

The girl took the money and the flimsy tickets and they went out into the street. Vjera hesitated as to the direction she should take, and Schmidt looked to her as though awaiting her orders.

"Twenty-eight and a half and six and a half are thirty-five," she said thoughtfully. "And we have nothing more to give, but this. I must sell it, Herr Schmidt."

"Well, what is it?" he asked, glad to know the secret at last.

"It is my mother's hair. She cut it off herself when she knew she was dying and she told me to sell it if ever I needed a little money."

The girl's voice trembled violently, and she turned her head away. Schmidt was silent and very grave. Then Vjera began to move on again, clutching the precious thing to her boosom and drawing her shawl over it.

"The best man for this lives in the Maffei Strasse," said Schmidt, after a few minutes.

"Show me the way." Vjera turned as he directed. At that moment she would have lost herself in the familiar streets, had he not been there to guide her.

The hairdresser's shop was brilliantly lighted, and as good fortune would have it, there were no customers within. With an entreating glance which he obeyed, Vjera made Schmidt wait outside.

"Please do not look!" she whispered. "I can bear it better alone." The good fellow nodded and began to walk up and down.

As Vjera entered the shop, the chief barber in command waltzed forward, as hairdressers always seem to waltz. At the sight of the poor girl, however, he assumed a stern appearance which, to tell the truth, was out of character with his style of beauty. His rich brown locks were curled and anointed in a way that might have aroused envy in the heart of an Assyrian dandy in the palmy days of Sardanapalus.

"Do you buy hair?" asked Vjera timidly offering her limp parcel.

"Oh, certainly, sometimes," answered the barber. The youth in attendance—the barber tadpole of the hairdresser frog—abandoned the cleansing of a comb and came forward with a leer, in the hope that Vjera might turn out to be pretty on a closer inspection. In this he was disappointed.

The man took the parcel and laid it on one of the narrow marble tables placed before a mirror in richly

gilt frame. He pushed aside the blue glass powder-box, the vial of brilliantine and the brushes. Vjera untied the bit of faded ribband herself and opened the package. The contents exhaled a faint, sickly odour.

A tress of beautiful hair, of unusual length and thickness, lay in the paper. The colour was that which is now so much sought after, and which great ladies endeavour to produce upon their own hair, when they have any, by washing it with extra-dry champagne, while little ladies imitate them with a humble solution of soda. The colour in question is a reddish-brown with rich golden lights in it, and it is very rare in nature.

The barber eyed the thick plait with a business-like expression.

"The colour is not so bad," he remarked, as though suggesting that it might have been very much better.

"Surely, it is very beautiful hair!" said Vjera, her heart almost breaking at the sight of the tenderly treasured heirloom.

Suddenly the man snuffed the odour, lifted the tress to his nose, and smelt it. Then he laid it down again and took the thicker end, which was tied tightly with a ribband, in his hands, pulling at the short lengths of hair which projected beyond the knot. They broke very easily, with an odd, soft snap.

"It is worth nothing at all," said the barber, decisively. "It is a pity, for it is a very pretty colour."

Vjera started, and steadied herself against the back of the professional chair which stood by the table.

"Nothing?" she repeated, half stupid with the pain of her disappointment. "Nothing? not even fifteen marks?"

"Nothing. It is rotten, and could not be worked. The hairs break like glass."

Vjera pressed her left hand to her side as though something hurt her. The tadpole youth grinned idiotically and the barber seemed anxious to end the interview.

With a look of broken-hearted despair the girl turned to the table and began to do up her parcel again. Her shawl fell to the ground as she moved. Then the tadpole nudged his employer and pointed at Vjera's long, red-brown braid, and grinned again from ear to ear.

"Is it fifteen marks that you want?" asked the man.

"Fifteen—yes—I must have fifteen," repeated Vjera in dull tones.

"I will give it to you for your own hair," said the barber, with a short laugh.

"For my own?" cried Vjera, suddenly turning round. It had never occurred to her that her own tress could be worth anything. "For my own?" she repeated as though not believing her ears.

"Yes—let me see," said the man. "Turn your head again, please. Let me see. Yes, yes, it is good hair of the kind, though it has not the gold lights in it that the other had. But, to oblige you, I will give you fifteen for it."

"But I must have the money now," said Vjera, suspiciously. "You must give me the money now, to take with me. I cannot wait."

The barber smiled, and produced a gold piece and five silver ones.

"You may hold the money in your hand," he said, offering it to her, "while you sit down and I do the work."

Vjera clutched the coins fiercely and placed herself in the big chair before the mirror. She could see in the glass that her eyes were on fire. The barber loosened a screw in the back of the seat and removed the block with the cushion, handing it to his assistant.

"The scissors, and a comb, Anton," he said briskly, lifting at the same time the heavy tress and judging its weight. The reflection of the steel flashed in the mirror, as the artist quickly opened and shut the scissors, with that peculiar shuffling jingle which only barbars can produce.

"Wait a minute!" cried Vjera, with sudden anxiety, and turning her head as though to draw away her hair from his grasp. "One minute—please—fifteen and thirty-five are really fifty, are they not?"

The tadpole began to count on his fingers, whispering audibly.

"Yes," answered the barber. "Fifteen and thirty-five are fifty."

The tadpole desisted, having already got into mathematical difficulties in counting from one hand over to the other.

"Then cut it off quickly, please!" said poor Vjera, settling herself in the chair again, and giving her head to the shears.

In the silence that followed, only the soft jingle of the scissors was heard.

"There!" exclaimed the hairdresser, holding up a hand-mirror behind her. "I have been generous, you see. I have not cut it very short. See for yourself."

"Thank you," said Vjera. "You are very kind." She saw nothing, indeed, but she was satisfied, and rose quickly.

She tied up the limp parcel with the same old piece of faded ribband, and a little colour suddenly came into her face as she pressed it to her bosom. All at once, she lost control of herself, and with a sharp sob the tears gushed out. She stooped a little and drew her shawl over her head to hide her face. The tears wet her hands and the brown paper, and fell down to the greasy marble floor of the shop.

"It will grow again very soon," said the barber, not unkindly. He supposed, naturally enough, that she was weeping over her sacrifice.

"Oh, no! It is not that!" she cried. "I am so—so happy to have kept this!" Then, without another word, she slipped noiselessly out into the street, clasping the precious relic to her breast.

CHAPTER XI

"I HAVE got it—I have got it all!" cried Vjera, as she came up with Schmidt on the pavement. His quick eye caught sight of the parcel, only half hidden by her shawl.

"But you have brought the hair away with you," he said, in some anxiety, and fearing a mistake or some new trouble.

"Yes," she answered. "That is the best of it." Her tears had disappeared as suddenly as they had come, and she could now hardly restrain the nervous laughter that rose to her lips.

"But how is that?" asked Schmidt, stopping.

"I gave them my own," she laughed, hysterically. "I gave them my own—instead. Quick, quick—there is no time to lose. Is it an hour yet, since I left him?" She ran along, and Schmidt found it hard to keep beside her without running too. At last he broke into a sort of jog-trot. In five minutes they were at the door of the Café.

The Count was sitting at a small table near the door, an empty coffee-cup before him, staring with a fixed look at the opposite wall. There were few people in the place, as the performances at the theatres had already begun. Vjera entered alone.

"I have brought you the money," she said, joyfully,

as she stood beside him and laid a hand upon his arm to attract his attention, for he had not noticed her coming.

"The money?" he said, excitedly. "The fifty marks? You have got it?"

She sat down at the table, and began to count the gold and silver, producing it from her pocket in instalments of four or five coins, and making little heaps of them before him.

"It is all there—every penny of it," she said, counting the piles again.

The poor man's eyes seemed starting from his head, as he leaned eagerly forward over the money.

"Is it real? Is it true?" he asked in a low voice. "Oh, Vjera, do not laugh at me—is it really true, child?"

"Really true—fifty marks." Her pale face beamed with pleasure. "And now you can go and pay Fischelowitz at once," she added.

But he leaned back a moment in his chair, looking at her intently. Then his eyes grew moist, and, when he spoke, his voice quivered.

"May God forgive me for taking it of you," he said. "You have saved me, Vjera—saved my honour, my life—all. God bless you, dear, God bless you! I am very, very thankful."

He put the coins carefully together and wrapped them in his silk handkerchief, and rose from his seat. He had already paid for his cup of coffee. They went out together. The Cossack had disappeared.

"You have saved my life and my honour—my honour and my life," repeated the Count, softly, and dwelling on the words in a dreamy way.

"I will wait outside," said Vjera, as they reached the tobacconist's shop, a few seconds later.

The Count turned to her and laid both hands upon her shoulders, looking into her face.

"You cannot understand what you have done for me," he said earnestly.

He stopped, for he was much taller than she, and closing his tired eyes for a moment, he pressed his lips upon her waxen forehead. Before he had seen the bright blush that glowed in her cheeks, he had entered the shop.

Akulina was seated in one corner, apparently in a bad humour, for her dark face was flushed, and her small eyes looked up savagely at the Count. Her husband was leaning over the counter, smoking and making a series of impressions in violet ink upon the back of an old letter, with an india-rubber stamp in which the words "Celebrated Manufactory" held a prominent place. He nodded familiarly.

"Herr Fischelowitz," said the Count, regaining suddenly his dignity of manner and bearing, "in the course of the conversation last evening, I said that I would to-day refund the fifty marks which you once lent to that atrocious young man who wore green glasses. I daresay you remember the circumstance?"

"I had quite forgotten it," said Fischelowitz. "Please do not allow it to trouble you, my dear Count.

I never considered you responsible for it, and of course you cannot ——"

"It is a shame!" Akulina broke in, angrily. "You ought to make him pay it out of what he earns, since he took the Gigerl?"

"Madam," said the Count, addressing her with great civility, "if it is agreeable to you, we will not discuss the matter. I only reminded Herr Fischelowitz of what took place because ——"

"Because you have no money—of course!" interrupted Akulina.

"On the contrary, because I have brought the money and shall be obliged to you if you will count it."

Akulina's jaw dropped, and Fischelowitz looked up in amazement. The Count produced his knotted handkerchief and laid it on the table.

"I only wish you to understand," he said, speaking to Akulina, "that when a gentleman gives his word he keeps it. Will you do me the favour to count the money?"

"Of course, it is no business of ours to find out how he got it," observed Akulina, rising and coming forward.

"None whatever, madam," answered the Count, spreading out the coins which had been collected by loving hands from so many sources. "The only question is, to ascertain whether there are fifty marks here or not."

Fischelowitz stood looking on. He had not yet recovered from his surprise, and was half afraid that

there might be something wrong. But the practical Akulina lost no time in assuring herself that the sum was complete. As she realised this fact, her features relaxed into a pleasant smile.

"Well, Count," she said, "we are very much obliged to you for this. It is very honest of you, for of course, you were not exactly called upon ——"

"I understood you to say that I was," replied the Count, gravely.

"Oh, that was yesterday, and I am very sorry if I annoyed you. But let bygones be bygones! I hope there is no ill-will between us?"

"Oh, none at all," returned the other, indifferently, "I have the honour to wish you a very good evening." Without waiting for more the Count bowed and left the shop.

"Akulina," said Fischelowitz, thoughtfully, as the door closed, "that man is a gentleman, say what you please."

"A pretty gentleman," laughed Akulina, putting the money into the till. "A gentleman indeed—why, look at his coat!"

"And you are a fool, Akulina," added Fischelowitz, handling his india-rubber stamp.

"Thank you; but for my foolery you would be fifty marks poorer to-night, Christian Gregorovitch. A gentleman, pah!"

The Count had drawn Vjera's willing arm through his, and they were walking slowly away together.

"I must be going home," she said, reluctantly. "The

little sister will be crying for me. I cannot leave her any longer."

"Not till I have thanked you, dear," he answered, pressing her arm to his side. "But I will go with you to your door, and thank you all the way—though the way is far too short for all I have to say."

"I have done nothing—it has really cost me nothing." Vjera squeezed her limp parcel under her shawl, and felt that she was speaking the truth.

"I cannot believe that, Vjera," said the Count.

"You could not have found so much money so quickly, without making some great sacrifice. But I will give it back to you ——"

"Oh, no—no," she cried, earnestly. "Make no promises to me. Think what this promise has cost you. When you have the money, you may give it back if you choose—but it would make me so unhappy if you promised."

"Would it, child? And yet my friends are waiting for me, and they have money for me too. Then, I will only say that I will give it back to you as soon as possible. Is that right?"

"Yes—and nothing more than that. And as for thanking me—what have I done that needs thanks? Would you not have done as much for me if—if, for instance, I had been ill, and could not pay the rent of the room? And then—think of the happiness I have had!"

The words were spoken so simply and it was so clear that they were true, that the Count found it

hard to answer. Not because he had nothing to express, but because the words for the expression could not be found. Again he pressed her arm.

"Vjera," he said, when they had walked some distance farther, "it is of no use to speak of this. There is that between you and me which makes speech contemptible and words ridiculous. There is only one thing that I can do, Vjera dearest. I can love you, dear, with all my heart. Will you take my love for thanks—and my devotion for gratitude? Will you, dear? Will you remember what you promised and what I promised last night? As soon as all is right, to-morrow, will you be my wife?"

"If it could ever be!" sighed the poor girl, recalled suddenly to the remembrance of his pitiful infirmity.

"It can be, it shall be, and it will be," he answered in tones of conviction. "They are waiting for me now, Vjera, in my little room—but they may wait, for I will not lose a moment of your dear company for them all. They are waiting for me with the money and the papers and the orders. I have waited long for them, they can afford to have a little patience now. And to-morrow, at this time, we shall be together, Vjera, in the train—I will have a special carriage for you and me, and then, a night and a day and another night and we shall be at home—for ever. How happy we shall be! Will you not be happy with me, darling? Why do you sigh?"

"Did I sigh?" asked Vjera, trying to laugh a little. He hardly noticed the question, but began to talk

again, as he had talked on the previous evening, describing all that he meant to do, and all that they would do together. Vjera heard and tried not to listen. Her joy was all gone. The great, overwhelming pleasure she had felt in dispelling his anxiety and in averting what had seemed a near and terrible catastrophe, gave place to the old, heart-rending pity for him, as he rambled on in his delusion. She had hoped that, as it was late on Wednesday evening, the time of it was past, and that, for another week, he would talk no more of his friends and his money and his return to fortune. But the fixed idea was there still, as dominant as ever. Her light tread grew weary and her head sank forward as she walked. For one short hour she had felt the glory of sacrificing all she had to give, to her love. Are there many who have felt as much, with as good reason, in a whole lifetime? But the hour was gone, taking with it the reality and leaving in its place a memory, fair, brilliant, and dear as the tress of golden hair Vjera was carrying home in her parcel, but as useless perhaps and as valueless in the world of realities as that had proved to be.

They reached her door and stopped in their walk. She looked up sadly into his eyes, as she held out her hand. He hesitated a moment, and then threw both his arms round her and drew her to his heart and kissed her passionately again and again. She tried to draw back.

"Oh, no, no!" she cried. "It cannot be so to-

morrow—why should you kiss me to-day?" But he would not let her go. She loved him, though she knew he was mad, and she let her head fall upon his shoulder, and allowed herself to believe in love for a moment.

Suddenly she felt that he was startled by something.

"Vjera!" he cried. "Have you cut off your beautiful hair? What have you done, child? How could you do it?"

"It was so heavy," she said, looking up with a bright smile. "It made my head ache—it is best so."

But he was not satisfied, for he guessed something of the truth, and the pain and horror that thrilled him told him that he had guessed rightly.

"You have cut it off—and you have sold it—you have sold your hair for me ——" he stammered in a broken voice.

She hung her head a little.

"I always meant to cut it off. I did not care for it, you know. And besides," she added, suddenly looking up again, "you will not love me less, will you? They said it would grow again—you will not love me less?"

"Love you less? Ah, Vjera, that promise I may make at least—never—to the end of ends!"

"And yet," she answered, "if it should all be true—if it only should—you could not—oh, I should not be worthy of you—you could never marry me."

The Count drew back a step and held out his right hand, with a strangely earnest look in his weary eyes. She laid her fingers in his almost unconsciously.

Then, as though he were in a holy place, he took off his hat, and stood bareheaded before her.

"If I forsake you, Vjera," he said very solemnly, "if I forsake you ever, in riches or in poverty, in honour or in disrepute, may the God of heaven forsake me in the hour of my death."

He swore the great oath deliberately, in a strong, clear voice, and then was silent for a moment, his eyes turned upwards, his attitude unchanged. Then he raised the poor girl's thin hand to his lips and kissed it three times, reverently, as devout persons kiss the relics of departed saints.

"Good-night, Vjera," he said, quietly. "We shall meet to-morrow."

Vjera was awed by his solemn earnestness, and strongly moved by his action.

"Good-night," she answered, lovingly. "Heaven bless you and keep you safe." She looked for a last time into his face, as though trying to impress upon her mind the memories of that fateful evening, and then she withdrew into the house, shutting the street door behind her.

The Count stood still for several minutes, unconsciously holding his hat in his hand. At last he covered his head and walked slowly away in the direction of his home. By degrees his mind fell into its old groove and he hastened his steps. From time to time, he fancied that some one was following him at no great distance, but though he glanced quickly over his shoulder he saw no one in the dimly lighted street. The

door of the house in which he lived was open, and he ran up the stairs at a great pace, sure that by this time his friends must be waiting for him in his room. When he reached it, all was dark and quiet. The echo of his own footsteps seemed still to resound in the staircase as he closed his door and struck a match. He found his small lamp in a corner, lighted it with some difficulty, set it on the table and sat down. There, beside him, propped up against two books, was the piece of paper on which he had written the few words for his friends, in case they came while he was out. He took it up, looked over it absently, and began to fold it upon itself again and again.

"Dear Vjera!" he exclaimed, in a low caressing tone, as he smoothed the folded strip between his fingers.

He was thinking, and thinking connectedly, of all that had just taken place, and wondering how it was that he had been able to accept such a sacrifice from one so little able to sacrifice anything. It seemed as though it should have been impossible for him to let the poor little shell-maker take upon herself his burden, and free him of it and set him right again in his own eyes.

"I know that I love her now," he said to himself.

And he was right. There are secret humiliations to which no man would submit, as such, but from which love, when it is real, can take away the sting and the poison. The man of heart, who does not love but is loved in spite of himself, fears to accept a sacrifice, lest

in so doing he should seem to declare his readiness to do as he is done by, from like motives. But when love is on both sides there is no such drawing back from love's responsibilities. The sacrifice is accepted not only with gratitude, but with joy, as a debt of which the repayment by sacrifice again constitutes in itself a happiness. And thus, perhaps, it is that they love best who love in sorrow and in want, in worldly poverty and in distress of soul, for they alone can know what joy it is to receive, and what yet infinitely greater joy lies in giving all when all is sorely needed.

But as the Count dwelt on the circumstances he saw also what it was that Vjera had done, and he wondered how she could have found the strength to do it. He did not, indeed, say to himself that for his sake she had parted with her only beauty, for he had never considered whether she were good-looking or not. The bond between them was of a different nature, and would not have been less strong had Vjera been absolutely ugly instead of being merely what is called plain. He would have loved her as well, had she been a cripple, or deformed, just as she loved him in spite of his madness. But he knew well enough how women, even the most wretched, value their hair when it is beautiful, what care they bestow upon it and what consolation they derive from the rich, silken coil denied to fairer women than themselves. There is something in the thought of cutting off the heavy tress and selling it which appeals to the pity of most people, and which, to women themselves, is full of horror. A man

might have felt the same in those days when long locks were the distinctive outward sign of nobility in man, and perhaps the respect of that obsolete custom has left in the minds of most people a sort of unconscious tradition. However that may be, we all feel that in one direction, at least, a woman's sacrifice can go no further than in giving her head to the shears.

The longer the Count thought of this, the more his gratitude increased, and the more fully he realised at what great cost poor Vjera had saved him from what he considered the greatest conceivable dishonour, from the shame of breaking his word, no matter under what conditions it had been given. He could, of course, repay her the money, so soon as his friends arrived, but by no miracle whatever could he restore to her head the only beauty it had ever possessed. He had scarcely understood this at first, for he had been confused and shaken by the many emotions which had in succession played upon his nervous mind and body during the past twenty-four hours. But now he saw it all very clearly. He had taken only money, which he would be able to restore; she had given a part of herself, irrevocably.

So deeply absorbed was he in his thoughts that the clock struck many successive quarters without rousing him from his reverie, or suggesting again to him the fixed idea by which his life was governed on that day of the week. But as midnight drew near, the prolonged striking of the bells at every quarter at last attracted his attention. He started suddenly and rose from his

seat, trying to count the strokes, but he had not heard the first ones and was astray in his reckoning. It was very late, that was certain, and not many minutes could elapse before the door would open and his friends would enter. He hastily smoothed his hair, looked to the flame of his bright little lamp and made a trip of inspection round the room. Everything was in order. He was almost glad that they were to come at night, for the lamplight seemed to lend a more cheerful look to the room. The Turkey-red cotton counterpane on the bed looked particularly well, the Count thought. During the next fifteen minutes he walked about, rubbing his hands softly together. At the first stroke of the following quarter he stood still and listened intently.

Four quarters struck, and then the big bell began to toll the hour. It must be eleven, he thought, as he counted the strokes. Eleven—twelve—he started, and turned very white, but listened still, for he knew that he should hear another clock striking in a few seconds. As the strokes followed each other, his heart beat like a fulling-hammer, giving a succession of quick blows, and pausing to repeat the rhythmic tattoo more loudly and painfully than before. Ten—eleven—twelve—there was no mistake. The day was over. It was midnight, and no one had come. The room swam with him.

Then, as in a vision of horror, he saw himself standing there, as he had stood many times before, listening for the last stroke, and suddenly awaking from the dream

to the crushing disappointment of the reality. For one brief and terrible moment his whole memory was restored to him and he knew that his madness was only madness, and nothing more, and that it seized him in the same way, week by week, through the months and the years, leaving him thus on the stroke of twelve each Wednesday night, a broken, miserable, self-deceived man. As in certain dreams we dream that we have dreamed the same things before, so with him an endless calendar of Wednesdays was unrolled before his inner sight, all alike, all ending in the same terror of conscious madness.

He had dreamed it all, there was no one to come to him in his distress, no one would ever enter that lonely room to bring back to him the treasures of a glorious past, for there was no one to come. It had all been a dream from beginning to end and there was no reality in it.

He staggered to his chair and sat down, pressing his lean hands to his aching temples and rocking himself to and fro, his breath hissing through his convulsively closed teeth. Still the fearful memory remained, and it grew into a prophetic vision of the future, reflecting what had been upon the distant scenery of what was yet to be. With that one deadly stroke of the great church bell, all was gone—fortune, friends, wealth, dignity. The majestic front of the palace of his hopes was but a flimsy, painted tissue. The fire that ran through his tortured brain consumed the gaudy, artificial thing in the flash and rush of a single flame, and left behind only

the charred skeleton framework, which had supported the vast canvas. And then he saw it again and again looming suddenly out of the darkness, brightening into beauty and the semblance of strength, to be as suddenly destroyed once more. With each frantic beat of his heart the awful transformation was renewed. For dreams need not time to spin out their intolerable length. With each burning throb of his raging blood, every nerve in his body, every aching recess of his brain, was pierced and twisted, and pierced again with unceasing agony.

Then a new horror was added to the rest. He saw before him the poor Polish girl, her only beauty shorn away for his sake, he saw all that he had promised in return, and he knew that he had nothing to give her, nothing, absolutely, save the crazy love of a wretched madman. He could not even repay her the miserable money which had cost her so dear. Out of his dreams of fortune there was not so much as a handful of coin left to give the girl who had given all she had, who had sold her hair to save his honour. With frightful vividness the truth came over him. That honour of his, he had pledged it in the recklessness of his madness. She had saved it out of love, and he had not even—but no—there was a new memory there—love he had for her, passionate, tender, true, a love that had not its place among the terrors of the past. But—was not this a new dream, a new delusion of his shaken brain? And if he loved her, was it not yet more terrible to have deceived the loved one, more mon-

strous, more infamous, more utterly damnable? The figure of her rose before him, pitiful, thin, weak, with outstretched hands and trusting eyes—and he had taken of her all she had. Neither heart, nor body, nor brain could bear more.

"Vjera! God! Forgive me!" With the cry of a breaking heart the poor Count fell forward from his seat and lay in a heap, motionless upon the floor.

Only his stiffening fingers, crooked and contorted, worked nervously for a few minutes, scratching at the rough boards. Then all was quite still in the little room.

There was a noise outside, and some one opened the door. The Cossack stood upon the threshold, holding his hand up against the lamp, for he was dazzled as he entered from the outer darkness of the stairs. He looked about, and at first saw nothing, for the Count had fallen in the shadow of the table. Then, seeing where he lay, Johann Schmidt came forward and knelt down, and with some difficulty turned his friend upon his back.

"Dead—poor Count?" he exclaimed in a low voice, bending down over the ghastly face.

The pale eyes were turned upward and inward, and the forehead was damp. Schmidt unbuttoned the threadbare coat from the breast. There was no waistcoat under it—nothing but a patched flannel shirt. A quantity of papers were folded neatly in a flat package in the inner pocket. Schmidt put down his head and listened for the beatings of the heart.

"So it is over!" he said mournfully, as he straight-

ened himself upon his knees. Then he took one of the extended hands in his, and pressed it, and looked into the poor man's face, and felt the tears coming into his eyes.

"You were a good man," he said in sorrowful tones, "and a brave man in your way, and a true gentleman —and—I suppose it was not your fault if you were mad. Heaven give you peace and rest!"

He rose to his feet, debating what he should do.

"Poor Vjera!" he sighed. "Poor Vjera—she will go next!"

Once more he looked down, and his eye caught sight of the papers projecting from the inner pocket of the coat, which was still open and thrown back upon the floor. It has been noticed more than once that Johann Schmidt was a man subject to attacks of quite irresistible curiosity. He hesitated a moment, and then came to the conclusion that he was as much entitled as any one else to be the Count's executor.

"It cannot harm him now," he said, as he extracted the bundle from its place.

One of the letters was quite fresh. The rest were evidently very old, being yellow with age and ragged at the edges. He turned over the former. It was addressed to Count Skariatine, at his lodging, and it bore the postmark of a town in Great-Russia, between Petersburg and Moscow. Schmidt took out the sheet, and his face suddenly grew very dark and angry. The handwriting was either in reality Akulina's or it resembled it so closely as to have deceived a better expert than the Cossack.

The missive purported to be written by the wife of Count Skariatine's steward, and it set forth in rather servile and illiterate language that the said Count Skariatine and his eldest son were both dead, having been seized on the same day with the smallpox, of which there had been an epidemic in the neighbourhood, but which was supposed to have quite disappeared when they fell ill. A week later and within twenty-four hours of each other they had breathed their last. The Count Boris Michaelovitch was now the heir, and would do well to come home as soon as possible to look after his possessions, as the local authorities were likely to make a good thing out of it in his absence.

The Cossack swore a terrific oath, and stamped furiously on the floor as he rose to his feet. It was evident to him that Akulina had out of spite concocted the letter, and had managed to have it posted by some friend in Russia. He was not satisfied with one expletive, nor with many. The words he used need not be translated for the reader of the English language. It is enough to say that they were the strongest in the Cossack vocabulary, that they were well selected, and applied with force and precision.

Johann Schmidt was exceedingly wroth with the tobacconist's wife, for it was clear that she had caused the Count's untimely death by her abominable practical joke. He went and leaned out of the window, churning and gnashing the fantastic expressions of his rage through his teeth.

Suddenly there was a noise in the room, a distinct, loud noise, as of shuffling with hands and feet. The Cossack's nerves were proof against ghostly terrors, but as he turned round he felt that his hair was standing erect upon his head.

The Count was on his feet and was looking at him.

CHAPTER XII

"I THOUGHT you were dead!" gasped the Cossack, in dismay.

There was no answer. The Count did not appear to hear Schmidt's voice nor to see his figure. He acted like a man walking in his sleep, and it was by no means certain to the friend who watched him that his eyes were always open. As though nothing unusual had happened, the Count calmly undressed himself and got into bed. Three minutes later he was sound asleep and breathing regularly.

For a long time Johann Schmidt stood transfixed with wonder in his place at the open window. At last it dawned upon him that his friend had not been really dead, but had fallen into some sort of fit in the course of his lonely meditations, from which he had been awakened by the Cossack's terrific swearing. Why the latter had seemed to be invisible and inaudible to him, was a matter which Schmidt did not attempt to solve. It was clear that the Count was alive, and sleeping like other people. Schmidt hesitated some time as to what he should do. It was possible that his friend might wake again, and find himself desperately ill. He had been so evidently unlike himself that Schmidt had feared he would become a raving maniac in the night, and had entered the house at his heels, seating himself upon the stairs just outside the door to wait for events,

with the odd fidelity and forethought characteristic of him. The Count's cry had warned him that all was not right, and he had entered the room, as has been seen.

He determined to wait some time longer, to see whether anything would happen. Meanwhile, he thrust Akulina's letter into his pocket, reflecting that as it was a forgery it would be best that the Count should not have it, lest he should be again misled by the contents. He sat down and waited.

Nothing happened. The clocks chimed the quarters up to one in the morning, a quarter-past, half-past—Schmidt was growing sleepy. The Count breathed regularly and lay in his bed without moving. Then, at last, the Cossack rose, looked at his friend once more, blew out the lamp, felt his way to the door and left the room. As he walked home through the quiet streets he swore that he would take vengeance upon Akulina, by producing the letter and reading it in her husband's presence, and before the assembled establishment, before the Count made his appearance. It was indeed not probable that he would come at all, considering all that he had suffered, though Schmidt knew that he generally came on Thursday morning, evidently weary and exhausted, but unconscious of the delusion which had possessed him during the previous day. Possibly, he was subject to a similar fit every Wednesday night, and had kept the fact a secret. Schmidt had always wondered what happened to him at the moment when he suddenly forgot his imaginary fortune and returned to his everyday senses.

The morning dawned at last, and it was Thursday. As there was no necessity for liberating the Count from arrest to-day, Akulina roused her husband with the lark, gave him his coffee promptly and sent him off to open the shop and catch the early customer. Before the shutters had been up more than a quarter of an hour, and while Fischelowitz was still sniffing the fresh morning air, Johann Schmidt appeared. His step was brisk, his brow was dark, and his boots creaked ominously. With a very brief salutation he passed into the back shop, slipped off his coat, and set to work with the determination of a man who feels that he must do something active as a momentary relief to his feelings.

Next came Vjera, paler than ever, with great black rings under her tired eyes, broken with the fatigues and anxieties of the previous day, but determined to double her work, if that were possible, in order to make up for the money she had borrowed of Schmidt and, through him, of Dumnoff. As she dropped her shawl, Fischelowitz caught sight of the back of her head, and broke into a laugh.

"Why, Vjera!" he cried. "What have you done? You have made yourself look perfectly ridiculous!"

The poor girl turned scarlet, and busied herself at her table without answering. Her fingers trembled as she tried to handle her glass tube. The Cossack, whose anger had not been diluted by being left to boil all night, dropped his swivel knife and went up to Fischelowitz with a look in his face so extremely disa-

greeable that the tobacconist drew back a little, not knowing what to expect.

"I will tell you something," said Schmidt, savagely. "You will have to change your manners if you expect any of us to work for you."

"What do you mean?" stammered Fischelowitz, in whom nature had omitted to implant the gift of physical courage, except in such measure as saved him from the humiliation of being afraid of his wife.

"I mean what I say," answered the Cossack. "And if there is anything I hate, it is to repeat what I have said before hitting a man." His fists were clinched already, and one of them looked as though it were on the point of making a very emphatic gesture. Fischelowitz retired backwards into the front shop, while Vjera looked on from within, now pale again and badly frightened.

"Herr Schmidt! Herr Schmidt! Please, please be quiet! It does not matter!" she cried.

"Then what does matter?" inquired the Cossack over his shoulders. "If Vjera has cut off her hair," he said, turning again to Fischelowitz, "she has had a good reason for it. It is none of your business, nor mine either."

So saying he was about to go back to his work again.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed the tobacconist. "Upon my word! I do not understand what has got into the fellow."

"You do not understand?" cried Schmidt, facing

him again. "I mean that if you laugh at Vjera I will break most of your bones."

At that moment Akulina's stout figure appeared, entering from the street. The Cossack stood still, glaring at her, his face growing white and contracted with anger. He was becoming dangerous, as good-tempered men will, when roused, especially when they have been brought up among people who, as a tribe, would rather fight than eat, at any time of day, from pure love of the thing. Even Akulina, who was not timid, hesitated as she stood on the threshold.

"What has happened?" she inquired, looking from Schmidt to her husband.

The latter came to her side, if not for protection, as might be maliciously supposed, at least for company.

"I cannot understand at all," said Fischelowitz, still edging away.

"You understand well enough, I think, and as for you, Frau Fischelowitz, I have something to talk of with you too. But we will put it off until later," he added, as though suddenly changing his mind.

The Count himself had appeared in the doorway behind Akulina. Both she and her husband stood aside, looking at him curiously.

"Good-morning," he said, gravely taking off his hat and inclining his head a little. He acted as though quite unconscious of what had happened on the previous day, and they watched him as he quietly went into the room beyond, into which the Cossack had retired on seeing him enter.

He hung up his hat in its usual place, nodding to Schmidt, who was opposite to him. Then, as he turned, he met Vjera's eyes. It was a supreme moment for her, poor child. Would he remember anything of what had passed on the previous day? Or had he forgotten all, his debt, her saving of him and the sacrifice she had made? He looked at her so long and so steadily that she grew frightened. Then all at once he came close to her, and took her hand and kissed it as he had done when they had last parted, careless of Schmidt's presence.

"I have not forgotten, dear Vjera," he whispered in her ear.

Schmidt passed them quickly and again went out, whether from a sense of delicacy, or because he saw an opportunity of renewing the fight outside, is not certain. He closed the door of communication behind him.

Vjera looked up into the Count's eyes and the blush that rarely came, the blush of true happiness, mounted to her face.

"I have not forgotten, dearest," he said again. "There is a veil over yesterday—I think I must have been ill—but I know what you did for me and—and ——" he hesitated as though seeking an expression.

For a few seconds again the poor girl felt the agony of suspense she knew so well.

"I do not know what right a man so poor as I has to say such a thing, Vjera," he continued. "But I love you, dear, and if you will take me, I will love you all

my life, more and more. Will it be harder to be poor together than each for ourselves, alone?"

Vjera let her head fall upon his shoulder, happy at last. What did his madness matter now, since the one memory she craved had survived its destroying influence? He had forgotten his glorious hopes, his imaginary wealth, his expected friends, but he had not forgotten her, nor his love for her.

"Thank God!" she sighed, and the happy tears fell from her eyes upon the breast of his threadbare coat.

"But we must not forget to work, dear," she said, a few moments later.

"No," he answered. "We must not forget to work." As she sat down to her table he pushed her chair back for her, and put into her hands her little glass tube, and then he went and took his own place opposite. For a long time they were left alone, but neither of them seemed to wonder at it, nor to hear the low, excited tones of many voices talking rapidly and often together in the shop outside. Whenever their eyes met, they both smiled, while their fingers did the accustomed mechanical work.

When Schmidt entered the outer shop for the second time, he found the tobacconist and his wife conversing in low tones together, in evident fear of being overheard. He came and stood before them, lowering his voice to the pitch of theirs, as he spoke.

"It is no fault of yours that the Count was not found dead in his bed this morning," he began, fixing his fiery eyes on Akulina.

"What? What? What is this?" asked Fischelowitz excitedly.

"Only this," said the Cossack, displaying the letter he had brought from the Count's rooms. "Nothing more. Your wife has succeeded very well. He is quite mad now. I found him last night, helpless, in a sort of fit, stiff and stark on the floor of his room. And this was in his pocket. Read it, Herr Fischelowitz. Read it, by all means. I suppose your wife does not mind your reading the letters she writes."

Fischelowitz took the letter stupidly, turned it over, saw the address and took out the folded sheet. Akulina's face expressed a blank amazement almost comical in its vacuity. For once, she was taken off her guard. Her husband read the letter over twice and examined the handwriting curiously.

"A joke is a joke, Akulina," he said at last. "But you have carried this too far. What if the Count had died?"

"I would like to know what I am accused of," said Akulina, "and what all this is about."

"I suppose you know your own handwriting," observed the Cossack, taking the letter from the tobacconist's hands and holding it before her eyes. "And if that is not enough to drive the poor man to the madhouse I do not know what is. Perhaps you have forgotten all about it? Perhaps you are mad too?"

Akulina read the writing in her turn. Then she grew very angry.

"It is an abominable lie!" she exclaimed. "I never

had anything to do with it. I do not know whence this letter comes, and I do not care. I know nothing about it."

"I suppose no one can prevent your saying so, at least," retorted the Cossack.

"It is very queer," observed Fischelowitz, suddenly thrusting his hands into his pockets and beginning to whistle softly as he looked through the shop window.

"When I tell you that it is not my handwriting, you ought to be satisfied ——" Akulina began.

"And yet none of us are," interrupted the Cossack, with a laugh. "Strange, is it not?"

Dumnoff now came in, and a moment later the insignificant girl, who began to giggle foolishly as soon as she saw that something was happening which she could not understand.

"None of us are satisfied," continued Johann Schmidt, taking the letter from Akulina. "Here, Dumnoff, here, Anna Nicolaevna, is this the Chosjaika's handwriting or not? Let everybody see and judge."

"It is outrageous!" exclaimed Akulina, trying to get possession of the letter again.

"You see how she tries to get it," laughed the Cossack, savagely. "She would be glad to tear it to pieces—of course she would.

"I wish you would all go about your business," said Fischelowitz, with an approach to asperity.

Akulina was furious, but she did not know what to do. Everybody began talking together.

"Of course it is the Barina's handwriting," said

Dumnoff confidently. He supposed it was always safe to follow Schmidt's lead, when he followed any one.

"Of course it is," chimed in the insignificant Anna.

"You—you minx—you flatter-cat, you little serpent!" cried Akulina, speaking three languages at once in her excitement. "Go—get along—go to your work ——"

"No, no, stay!" exclaimed the Cossack, authoritatively. "Do you know what this is?" he asked of all present again. "Our good mistress, here, has for some reason or other been trying to make the Count worse by having sham letters posted to him from home ——"

"It is a lie! A base, abominable lie! Turn the man out, Christian Gregorovitch! Turn him out, or send for the police."

"Turn him out yourself," answered the tobacconist, phlegmatically.

"Posted to him from home," continued the Cossack, "and telling him that his father and brother are dead, and that he has come into property and the like. What do you think of that?"

"It is a shame," growled Dumnoff, beginning to understand.

The girl laughed foolishly.

"I swear to you," began Akulina, crimson with anger. "I swear to you by all ——"

"Customers, customers!" exclaimed Fischelowitz, in a stage whisper. "Quiet, I tell you!" He made a rush for the other side of the counter, and briskly

assumed his professional smile. The others fell back into the corners.

Two gentlemen in black entered the shop. The one was a stout, angry-looking person of middle age, very dark, and very full about the lower part of the face, which was not concealed by the closely cut black beard. His companion was a diminutive little man, very thin and very spruce, not less than fifty years old. His face was entirely shaved and was deeply marked with lines and furrows. A pair of piercing grey eyes looked through big gold-rimmed spectacles. As he took off his hat, a few thin, sandy-coloured locks fluttered a little and then settled themselves upon the smooth surface of his cranium, like autumn leaves falling upon a marble statue in a garden.

"Herr Fischelowitz?" inquired the larger of the two customers, touching his hat but not removing it.

"At your service," answered the tobacconist. "Cigarettes?" he inquired. "Strong? Light? Kir, Samson, Dubec?"

"I am the new Russian Consul," said the stranger. "This gentleman is just arrived from Petersburg and has business with you."

"My name is Konstantin Grabofsky, and I am a lawyer," observed the little man, very sharply.

Fischelowitz bowed till his nose almost came into collision with the counter. The others in the shop held their peace and opened their eyes.

"And I am told that Count Boris Michaelovitch Skariatine is here," continued the lawyer.

"Oh—the mad Count!" exclaimed Akulina with an angry laugh, and coming forward. "Yes, we can tell you all about him."

"I am sorry," said Grabofsky, "to hear you call him mad, since my business is with him, Barina, and not with you." His tone was, if possible, more incisive than before.

"Of course, we know that he is not a Count at all," said Akulina, somewhat annoyed by his sharpness.

"Do you? Then you are singularly mistaken. I shall be obliged if you will inform Count Skariatine that Konstantin Grabofsky desires the honour of an interview with him."

"Go and call him, Akulina," said Fischelowitz, "since the gentleman wishes to see him."

"Go yourself," retorted his wife.

"Go together, and be quick about it!" said the Consul, who was tired of waiting.

"And please to say that I wait his convenience," added the lawyer.

Dumnoff moved to Schmidt's side and whispered into his ear.

"Do you think they have come about the Gigerl?" he inquired anxiously. "Do you think they will arrest us again?"

"Durak!" laughed the Cossack. "How can two Russian gentlemen arrest you in Munich? This is something connected with the Count's friends. It is my belief that they have come at last. See—here he is."

The Count now entered from the back shop, calm

and collected, as though not expecting anything extraordinary. The Russian Consul took off his hat and bowed with great politeness and the Count returned the salutation with equal civility. Fischelowitz and Akulina stood in the background anxiously watching events.

The lawyer also bowed, and then, turning his face to the light, held his hand out.

"You have not forgotten me, Count Skariatine?" he said, in a tone of inquiry.

The Count stared hard at him as he took the proffered hand. Gradually, his face underwent a change. His forehead contracted, his eyes closed a little, his eyebrows rose, and an expression of quiet disdain settled about the lines of his mouth.

"I know you very well," he answered. "You are Doctor Konstantin Grabofsky, my father's lawyer. Do you come from him to renew the offer you made when we parted?"

"I have no offer to make," said the little man. "Will you do me the honour to indicate some place where we may be alone together for a moment?"

"I have no objection to that," replied the Count. "We can go into the street."

They passed out together, leaving the establishment of Christian Fischelowitz in a condition of great astonishment. The tobacconist hastily produced his best cigarettes and entreated the Consul to try one, making signs to the other occupants of the shop to return to their occupations in the inner room.

"How long have you known Count Skariatine?" inquired the Consul, carelessly, when he was alone with Fischelowitz.

"Six or seven years," answered the latter.

"I suppose you know his story? Your wife was good enough to inform us of that fact, though Doctor Grabofsky has reason to doubt the value of her information."

"We only know that he calls himself a Count." Fischelowitz held the authorities of his native country in holy awe, and was almost frightened out of his senses at being thus questioned by the Consul.

"He is quite at liberty to do so," answered the latter, with a laugh. "The story is simple enough," he continued, "and there is no reason why you should not know it. The late Count Skariatine had two sons, of whom the present Count was the younger. Ten years ago, when barely twenty, he quarrelled with his father and elder brother, and they parted in anger. I must say that he seems to have acted hastily, though the old gentleman's views of life were eccentric, to say the least of it. For some reason or other, the elder brother never married. I have heard it said that he was crippled in childhood. Be that as it may, he was vindictive and spiteful by nature, and prevented the quarrel from being forgotten. The younger brother left the house with the clothes on his back, and steadily refused to accept the small allowance offered him, and which was his by right. And now the father and the eldest son are dead—they died suddenly of the small-

pox—and Doctor Grabofsky has come to inform the Count that he is the heir. There you have the story in a nutshell."

"Then it is all true, after all!" cried Fischelowitz. "We all thought ——"

"Thinking, when one knows nothing, is a dangerous and useless pastime," observed the Consul. "I will take a box of these cigarettes with me. They are good."

"Thank you most obediently, Milostivy Gosudar!" exclaimed Fischelowitz, bowing low. "I trust that the Gospodin Consul will honour me with his patronage. I have a great variety of tobaccos, Kir, Basma, Samson, Dubec Imperial, Swary ——"

While Fischelowitz was recommending the productions of his Celebrated Manufactory to the Consul, Grabofsky and the Count were walking together up and down the smooth pavement outside.

"A great change has taken place in your family," Grabofsky was saying. "Had anything less extraordinary occurred, I should have written to you instead of coming in person. Your brother is dead, Count Skariatine."

"Dead!" exclaimed the Count, who had no recollection of the letter abstracted from his pocket by the Cossack. It had reached him after the weekly attack had begun, and the memory of it was gone with that of so many other occurrences.

"Dead," repeated the lawyer, sharply, as though he would have made a nail of the word to drive it into the coffin.

"And how many children has he left?" inquired the Count.

"He died unmarried."

"So that I ——"

"You are the lawful heir."

"Unless my father marries again." The colour rose in the Count's lean cheeks.

"That is impossible."

"Why?"

"Because he is dead too."

"Then ——"

"You are Count Skariatine, and I have the honour to offer you my services at this important juncture."

The Count breathed hard. The shock, overtaking him when he was in his normal condition, was tremendous. The colour came and went rapidly in his features, and he caught his breath, leaning heavily upon the little lawyer, who watched his face with some anxiety. Akulina's remark about the Count's madness had made him more careful than he would otherwise have been in his manner of breaking the news.

"I am not well," said the Count in a low voice. "To-day is Wednesday—I am never well on Wednesdays."

"To-day is Thursday," answered Grabofsky.

"Thursday? Thursday ——" the Count reeled, and would have fallen, but for the support of the nervous little man's wiry arm.

Then in the space of a second took place that strange phenomenon of the intelligence which is as yet

so imperfectly understood. It is called the "Transfer" in the jargon of the half-developed science which deals with suggestion and the like. Its effects are strange, sudden and complete, often observed, never understood, but chronicled in hundreds of cases and analysed in every seat of physiological learning in Europe. In the twinkling of an eye, a part or the whole of the intelligence, or of the sensations, is reversed in action, and this with a logical precision of which no description can give any idea. It is universally considered as the first step in the direction of recovery.

The action of the Count's mind was "transferred," therefore, since the word is consecrated by usage. Fortunately for him, the transfer coincided with a material change in his fortunes. Had this not been the case it would have had the effect of making him mad through the whole week, and sane only from Tuesday evening until the midnight of Wednesday. As it was, the result was of a contrary nature. Being now in reality restored to wealth and dignity, he was able to understand and appreciate the reality during six days, becoming again, in imagination, a cigarette-maker upon the seventh, a harmless delusion which already shows signs of disappearing, and from which the principal authorities confidently assert that he will soon be quite free.

He passed but one moment in a state of semi-consciousness. Then he raised his head and stood erect, and to the great surprise of Grabofsky, showed no further surprise at the news he had just received.

"The fact is," he said, quietly, "I was expecting you yesterday. I had received a letter from the wife of the steward informing me of the death of my father and brother. I think your coming to-day must have disturbed me, as I have some difficulty in recalling the circumstances which attended our meeting here."

"A passing indisposition," suggested Grabofsky. "Nothing more. The weather is warm, sultry in fact."

"Yes, it must have been that. And now, we had better communicate the state of things to Herr Fischelowitz, to whom I consider myself much indebted."

"Our Consul came with me," said the lawyer. "He is in the shop. Perhaps you did not notice him."

"No—I do not think I did. I am afraid he thought me very careless."

"Not at all, not at all." Grabofsky began to think that there had been some truth in Akulina's remarks after all, but he kept his opinion to himself, then and afterwards, a course which was justified by subsequent events. He and the Count turned towards the shop, and, entering, found Fischelowitz and the Consul conversing together.

The Count bowed to the latter with much ceremony.

"I fear," he said, "that you must have thought me careless just now. The suddenness of the news I have received has affected me. Pray accept my best thanks for your kindness in accompanying Doctor Grabofsky this morning."

"Do not mention it, Count. I am only too glad to be of service."

"You are very kind. And now, Herr Fischelowitz," he continued, turning to the tobacconist, "it is my pleasant duty to thank you also. I looked for these gentlemen yesterday. They have arrived to-day. The change which I expected would take place has come, and I am about to return to my home. The memories of poverty and exile can never be pleasant, but I do not think that I have any just reason to complain. Will it please you, Herr Fischelowitz, and you, gentlemen, to go into the next room with me? I wish to take my leave of those who have so long been my companions."

Fischelowitz opened the door of communication and held it back respectfully for the Count to pass. His ideas were exceedingly confused, but his instinct told him to make all atonement in his power for his wife's outbursts of temper. The Count entered first, and the other three followed him, Grabofsky, the Consul and Fischelowitz. The little back shop was very full. To judge from the last accents of Akulina's voice she had been repaying Johann Schmidt with compound interest, now that the right was on her side, for the manner in which he had attacked her. As the Count entered, however, all held their peace, and he began to speak in the midst of total silence. He stood by the little black table upon which his lean, stained fingers had manufactured so many hundreds of thousands of cigarettes.

"Herr Fischelowitz," he began, "I am here to say good-bye to you, to your good wife, and to my companions. During a number of years you have afforded me the opportunity of earning an honest living, and I have to thank you very heartily for the forbearance you have shown me. It is not your fault if your consideration for me has sometimes taken a passive rather than an active form. It was not your business to fight my battles. Give me your hand, Herr Fischelowitz. We part, as we have lived, good friends. I wish you all possible success."

The tobacconist bowed low as he respectfully shook hands.

"Too much honour," he said.

"Frau Fischelowitz," continued the Count, "you have acted according to your lights and your beliefs. I bear you no ill-will. I only hope that if any other poor gentleman should ever take my place you will not make his position harder than it would naturally be, and I trust that all may be well with you."

"I never meant it, Herr Graf," said Akulina, awkwardly, as she took his proffered hand.

He turned to the Cossack.

"Good-bye, Johann Schmidt, good-bye. I shall see you again, before long. We have always helped each other, my friend. I have much to thank you for."

"You have helped me, you mean," said the Cossack, in a rather shaky voice.

"No, no—each other, and we will continue to do

so, I hope, in a different way. Good-bye, Dumnoff. You have a better heart than people think."

"Are you not going to take me to Russia, after all?" asked the mujik, almost humbly.

"Did I say I would? Then you shall go. But not as coachman, Dumnoff. Not as coachman, I think. Good-bye, Anna Nicolaevna," he said, turning to the insignificant girl, who was at last too much awed to giggle.

Then he came to Vjera's place. The girl was leaning forward, hiding her face in her hands, and resting her small, pointed elbows on the table.

"Vjera, dear," he said, bending down to her, "will you come with me now?"

She looked up suddenly, and her face was very white and drawn, and wet with tears.

"Oh, no, no!" she said in a low voice. "How can I ever be worthy of you, since it is really true?"

But the Count put his arm round the poor little shell-maker's waist, and made her stand beside him in the midst of them all.

"Gentlemen," he said, in his calmly dignified manner, "let me present to you the Countess Skariatine. She will bear that name to-morrow. I owe you a confession before leaving you, in her honour and to my humiliation. I had contracted a debt of honour, and I had nothing wherewith to pay it. There was but an hour left—an hour, and then my life and my honour would have been gone together."

Vjera looked up into his face with a pitiful entreaty, but he would go on.

"She saved me, gentlemen," he continued. "She cut off her beautiful hair from her head, and sold it for me. But that is not the reason why she is to be my wife. There is a better reason than that. I love her, gentlemen, with all my heart and soul, and she has told me that she loves me."

He felt her weight upon him, and, looking down, he saw that she had fainted in his arms, with a look of joy upon her poor wan face which none there had ever seen in the face of man or woman.

And so love conquered.

THE END.

KHALED: A TALE OF ARABIA

CHAPTER I

KHALED stood in the third heaven, which is the heaven of precious stones, and of Asrael, the angel of Death. In the midst of the light shed by the fruit of the trees Asrael himself is sitting, and will sit until the day of the resurrection from the dead, writing in his book the names of those who are to be born, and blotting out the names of those who have lived their years and must die. Each of the trees has seventy thousand branches, each branch bears seventy thousand fruits, each fruit is composed of seventy thousand diamonds, rubies, emeralds, carbuncles, jacinths, and other precious stones. The stature and proportions of Asrael are so great that his eyes are seventy thousand days' journey apart, the one from the other.

Khaled stood motionless during ten months and thirteen days, waiting until Asrael should rest from his writing and look towards him. Then came the holy night called Al Kadr, the night of peace in which the Koran came down from heaven. Asrael paused, and raising his eyes from the scroll saw Khaled standing before him.

Asrael knew Khaled, who was one of the genii converted to the faith on hearing Mohammed read the Koran by night in the valley Al Nakhlah. He won-

dered, however, when he saw him standing in his presence; for the genii are not allowed to pass even the gate of the first heaven, in which the stars hang by chains of gold, each star being inhabited by an angel who guards the entrance against the approach of devils.

Asrael looked at Khaled in displeasure, therefore, supposing that he had eluded the heavenly sentinels, and concealed an evil purpose. But Khaled inclined himself respectfully.

"There is no Allah but Allah. Mohammed is the prophet of Allah," he said, thus declaring himself to be of the Moslem genii, who are upright and are true believers.

"How camest thou hither?" asked Asrael.

"By the will of Allah, who sent his angel with me to the gate," Khaled answered. "I am come hither that thou mayest write down my name in the book of life and death, that I may be a man on earth, and after an appointed time thou shalt blot it out again and I shall die."

Asrael gazed at him and knew that this was the will of Allah, for the angels are thus immediately made conscious of the divine commands. He took up his pen to write, but before he had traced the first letter he paused.

"This is the night Al Kadr," he said. "If thou wilt, tell me therefore thy story, for I am now at leisure to hear it."

"Thou knowest that I am of the upright genii,"

Khaled answered, "and I am well disposed towards men. In the city of Riad, in Arabia, there rules a powerful king, the Sultan of the kingdom of Nejed, blessed in all things save that he has no son to inherit his vast dominions. One daughter only has been born to him in his old age, of such marvellous beauty that even the Black Eyed Virgins enclosed in the fruit of the tree Sedrat, who wait for the coming of the faithful, would seem but mortal women beside her. Her eyes are as the deep water in the wells of Zobeideh when it is night and the stars are reflected therein. Her hair is finer than silk, red with henna, and abundant as the foliage of the young cypress tree. Her face is as fair as the kernels of young almonds, and her mouth is sweeter than the mellow date and more fragrant than 'Ood mingled with ambergris. She possesses moreover all the virtues which become women, for she is as modest as she is beautiful and as charitable as she is modest. From all parts of Arabia and Egypt, and from Syria and from Persia, and even from Samarkand, from Afghanistan and from India, princes and kings' sons continually come to ask her in marriage, for the fame of her beauty and of her virtues is as wide as the world. But her father, desiring only her happiness, leaves the choice of a husband to herself, and for a long time she refused all her suitors. For there is in the palace at Riad a certain secret chamber from which she can observe all those who come and hear their conversation and see the gifts which they bring with them.

"At last there came as a suitor an unbeliever, a

prince of an island by the shores of India, beautiful as the moon, whose speech was honey, and who surpassed all the suitors in riches and in the magnificence of the presents he brought. For he came bearing with him a hundred pounds' weight of pure gold, and five hundred ounces of ambergris, and a great weight of musk and sloes and sandal wood, and rich garments without number, and many woven shawls of Kashmir, of which the least splendid was valued at a thousand sherifs of gold. An innumerable retinue accompanied him, and twenty elephants, and horses without number, besides camels.

"The Sultan's daughter beheld this beautiful prince from her secret hiding-place, and all that he had brought with him. The Sultan received him with kindness and hospitality, but assured him that unless he would renounce idolatry and embrace the true faith he could not hope to succeed in his purpose. Thereupon he was much cast down, and soon afterwards, having received magnificent gifts in his turn, he would have departed on his way, disappointed and heavy at heart. But Zehowah sent for her father, and entreated him to bid the young prince remain. 'For it is not impossible,' she said, 'that he may yet be converted to the true faith. And have I the right to refuse to sacrifice my freedom when the sacrifice may be the means of converting an idolater to the right way? And if I marry him and go with him to his kingdom, shall we not make true believers of all his subjects, so that I shall deserve to be called the mother of the

faithful, like Ayesha, beloved by the Prophet, upon whom be peace?' The Sultan found it hard to oppose this argument, which was founded upon virtue and edified in righteousness. He therefore entreated the Indian prince to remain and to profess Islam, promising the hand of Zehowah when he should be converted.

"Then I heard the prince taking secret counsel with a certain old man who was with him, who shaved his face and wore white clothing and ate food which he prepared for himself alone. The prince told all, and then the old man counselled him in this way. 'Speak whatsoever words they require of thee,' he said, 'for words are but garments wherewith to make the nakedness of truth modest and agreeable. And take the woman, and by and by, when we are returned to our own land, if she consent to worship thy gods, it is good; and if not, it is yet good, for thou shalt possess her as thy wife, and her unbelief shall be of consequence only to her own soul, but thy soul shall not be retarded in its progress.' And the young prince was pleased, and promised to do as his counsellor advised him.

"So I saw that he was false and that Zehowah's righteousness would be but the means to her sorrow if she were allowed to persist. Therefore in the night, when all were asleep in the palace, I entered into the room where the prince was lying, and I took him in my arms and flew with him to the midst of the Red Desert, and there I slew him and buried him in the sand, for I saw that he was a liar and had determined to be a hypocrite.

"But Allah immediately sent an angel to destroy me because I had put to death a man who was about to become a believer, thereby killing his soul also, since he had not yet made profession of the faith. But I stood up and defended myself, saying that I had slain a hypocrite who had planned in his heart to carry away the daughter of a Moslem. Then the angel asked the truth of the prince's soul, which was sitting upon the red sand that covered the body. The soul answered, weeping, and said: 'These are true words, and I am fuel for hell.' 'Have I then deserved death?' I asked. 'I have killed an unbeliever.' The angel answered that I had deserved life; and he would have left me and returned to paradise, but I would not let him go, and I besought him to entreat Allah that I might be allowed to live the life of a mortal man upon earth. 'For,' I said, 'thou sayest that I deserve life. But even if thou destroy me not now I am only one of the genii, who shall all die at the first blast of the trumpet before the resurrection of the dead. Obtain for me therefore that I may have a soul and live a few years, and if I do good I shall then be with the faithful in paradise; and if not, I shall be bound with red-hot chains and burn everlastingly like a sinful man.' The angel promised to intercede for me and departed. So I sat down upon the mound of red sand beside the soul of the Indian prince, to wait for the angel's coming again.

"Then the soul reproached me angrily. 'But for thee,' it said, 'I should have married Zehowah and returned to my own people, and although I purposed to

be a hypocrite, yet in time Zehowah might have convinced me and I should have believed in my heart. For I now see that there is no Allah but Allah, and that Mohammed is the prophet of Allah. And I should perhaps have died full of years, a good Moslem, and should have entered paradise. Therefore I pray Allah that this may be remembered in thy condemnation.' At these words I was very angry and reviled the soul, scoffing at it. 'No doubt Allah will hear thy prayer,' I answered, 'and will hear also at the same time thy lies. And as for Zehowah, thinkest thou that she would have loved thee, even if she had married thee? I tell thee that her soul rejoices only in the light of the faith, and that although she might have married thee, she would have done so in the hope of turning thy people from the worship of false gods and not for love of thee. For she will never love any man.' When I had said this the soul groaned aloud and then remained silent.

"In a little while the angel came back, and I saw that his face was no longer clouded with anger. 'Hear the judgment of Allah,' he said. 'Inasmuch as thou tookest the law upon thyself, which belonged to Allah alone, thou deservest to die. But in so far as thou hast indeed slain a hypocrite and an unbeliever thou hast earned life. Allah is just, merciful and forgiving. It is not meet that in thy lot there should be nothing but reward or nothing but punishment. Therefore thou shalt not yet receive a soul. Go hence to the third heaven, and when the angel Asrael shall be at leisure

he will write thy name in the book of the living. Then thou shalt return hither and go into the city of Riad bearing gifts. And Zehowah will accept thee in marriage, though she love thee not, for Allah commands that it be so. But if in the course of time this virtuous woman be moved to love, and say to thee, "Khaled, I love thee," then at that moment thou shalt receive an immortal soul, and if thy deeds be good thy soul shall enter paradise with the believers, but if not, thou shalt burn. Thus saith Allah. Thus art thou rewarded, indeed, but wisely and temperately, since thou hast not obtained life directly, but only the hope of life.' Then the angel departed again, leading the way.

"But the soul mocked me. 'Thou that sayest of Zehowah that she will never love any man, thou art fallen into thine own trap,' it cried. 'For now, if she love thee not thou must perish. Truly, Allah heard my prayer.' But I was filled with thankfulness and departed after the angel, leaving the soul sitting alone upon the red sand.

"Thus have I told thee my history, O Asrael. And now I pray thee to write my name in the book of the living, that I may fulfil the command of Allah and go my way to the city of Riad."

Then Asrael again took up his pen to write in the book.

"Now thou art become a living man, though thou hast as yet no soul," he said. "And thou art subject to death by the sword and by sickness and by all those evils which spring up in the path of the living. And

the day of thy death is already known to Allah, who knows all things. But he is merciful and will doubtless grant thee a term of years in which to make thy trial. Nevertheless be swift in thy journey and speedy in all thou doest, for though mortal man may live for ever hereafter in glory, his years on earth are but as the breath which springs up in the desert towards evening and is gone before the stars appear."

Khaled made a salutation before Asrael and went out of the third heaven, and passed through the second which is of burnished steel, and through the first in which the stars hang by golden chains, where Adam waits for the day of the resurrection, and at the gate he found the angel who had led him, and who now lifted him in his arms and bore him back to the Red Desert; for as he was now a mortal man he could no longer move through the air like the genii between the outer gate of heaven and the earth. Nor could he any longer see the soul of the Indian prince sitting upon the sand, though it was still there. But the angel was visible to him. So they stood together, and the angel spoke to him.

"Thou art now a mortal man," he said, "and subject to time as to death. To thee it seems but a moment since we went up together to the gate, and yet thou wast standing ten months and thirteen days before Asrael, and of the body of the man whom thou slewest only the bones remain."

So saying the angel blew upon the red sand and Khaled saw the white bones of the prince in the place

where he had laid his body. So he was first made conscious of time.

"Nearly a year has passed, and though Allah be very merciful to thee, yet he will assuredly not suffer thee to live beyond the time of other men. Make haste therefore and depart upon thine errand. Yet because thou art come into the world a grown man, having neither father nor mother nor inheritance, I will give thee what is most necessary for thy journey."

Then the angel took a handful of leaves from a ghada bush close by and gave them to Khaled, and as he gave them they were changed into a rich garment, and into linen, and into a shawl with which to make a turban, and shoes of red leather.

"Clothe thyself with these," said the angel.

He broke a twig from the bush and placed it in Khaled's hand. Immediately it became a sabre of Damascus steel, in a sheath of leather with a belt.

"Take this sword, which is of such fine temper that it will cleave through an iron headpiece and a shirt of mail. But remember that it is not a sword made by magic. Let thy magic reside in thy arm, wield it for the faith, and put thy trust in Allah."

Afterwards the angel took up a locust that was asleep on the sand waiting for the warmth of the morning sun. The angel held the locust up before Khaled, and then let it fall. But as it fell it became at once a beautiful bay mare with round black eyes wide apart and an arching tail which swept down to the sand like a river of silk.

"Take this mare," said the angel; "she is of the pure breed of Nejed and as swift as the wind, but mortal like thyself."

"But how shall I ride her without saddle or bridle?" asked Khaled.

"That is true," answered the angel.

He laid leaves of the ghada upon the mare's back and they became a saddle, and placed a twig in her mouth and it turned into a bit and bridle.

Khaled thanked the angel and mounted.

"Farewell and prosper, and put thy trust in Allah, and forget not the day of judgment," the angel said, and immediately returned to paradise.

So Khaled was left alone in the Red Desert, a living man obliged to shift for himself, liable to suffer hunger and thirst or to be slain by robbers, with no worldly possessions but his sword, his bay mare, and the clothes on his back. He knew moreover that he was more than two hundred miles from the city of Riad, and he knew that he could not accomplish this journey in less than four days. For when he was one of the genii he had often watched men toiling through desert on foot, and on camels and on horses, and had laughed with his companions at the slow progress they made. But now it was no laughing matter, for he had forgotten to ask the angel for dates and water, or even for a few handfuls of barley meal.

He turned the mare's head westward of the Goat, in which is the polar star, for he remembered that when he had carried away the Indian prince he had flown

towards the south-east, and as he began to gallop over the dark sand he laughed to himself.

"What poor things are men and their horses," he said. "To destroy me, this mare need only stumble and lame herself, and we shall both die of hunger and thirst in the desert."

This reflection made him at first urge the mare to her greatest speed, for he thought that the sooner he should be out of the desert and among the villages beyond, the present danger would be passed. But presently he bethought him that the mare would be more likely to stumble and hurt herself in the dark if she were galloping than if she were moving at a moderate pace. He therefore drew bridle and patted her neck and made her walk slowly and cautiously forward.

But this did not please him either, after a time, for he remembered that if he rode too slowly he must die of hunger before reaching the end of his journey.

"Truly," he said, "one must learn what it is to be a man, in order to understand the uses of moderation. Gallop not lest thy horse fall and thou perish! Nor delay, walking slowly by the road, lest thou die of thirst and hunger! Yet thou art not safe, for Al Walid died from treading upon an arrow, and Oda ibn Kais perished by perpetual sneezing. Allah is just and merciful! I will let the mare go at her own pace, for the end of all things is known."

The mare, being left to herself, began to canter, and carried Khaled onward all night without changing her gait.

"Nevertheless," thought Khaled, "if we are not soon out of the desert we shall suffer thirst during the day as well as hunger."

When there was enough daylight to distinguish a black thread from a white, Khaled looked before him and saw that there was nothing but red sand in hillocks and ridges, with ghada bushes here and there. But still the mare cantered on and did not seem tired. Soon the sun rose and it grew very hot, for the air was quite still and it was summer time.

Khaled looked always before him and at last he saw a white patch in the distance and he knew that there must be water near it. For the water of the Red Desert whitens the sand. He therefore rode on cheerfully, for he was now thirsty, and the mare quickened her pace, for she also knew that she was near a drinking-place. But as they came close to the spot Khaled remembered that the preceding night had been Al Kadr, which falls between the seventh and eighth latter days of the month Ramadhan, during which the true believers neither eat nor drink so long as there is light enough to distinguish a white thread from a black one. So, when they reached the well, he let his mare drink her fill, and he took off the saddle and bridle and let her loose, after which he sat down with his head in the shade of a ghada bush to rest himself.

"Allah is merciful," he said; "the night will come, and then I will drink." For he dared not ride farther, for fear of not finding water again.

Then again he was disturbed, for he had nothing to

eat, and he thought that if he waited until night he would be hungry as well as thirsty. But presently he saw the mare trying to catch the locusts that flew about. She could only catch one or two, because it was now hot and they were able to fly quickly.

"When the night comes," he said, "the locusts will lie on the ground and cling to the bushes, being stiff with the cold, and then I will eat my fill, and drink also."

Soon afterwards he fell asleep, being weary, and when he awoke it was night again and the stars were shining overhead. Khaled rose hastily and drank at the well and made ablutions and prayed, prostrating himself towards the Kebla. He remembered that he had slept a long time, and that he had not performed his devotions for a day and a night, so that he repeated them five times, to atone for the omission.

The mare was eating the locusts that now lay in great black patches on the sand unable to move and save themselves. Khaled threw his cloak over a great number of them and gathered them together. Then he kindled a fire of ghada by striking sparks from the blade of his sword, and when he had made a bed of coals he roasted the locusts after pulling off their legs, and ate his fill. While he was doing this he was much disturbed in mind.

"I have only just begun to live as a man," he thought. "Did I not stand ten months and thirteen days in the third heaven, unconscious of the passing of time? Who shall tell me whether I have not slept another ten

months or more under this bush, like the companions of Al Rakim?"

So, when he had done eating and had drunk again from the well, and had made the mare drink, he saddled her quickly and mounted, and cantered on through the night, guiding his course by the stars. On the following day he again found a well, but much later than before, and he suffered much from thirst as he watched his mare dip her black lips into the pool. Nevertheless he would not break his fast, for he was resolved to be a true believer in practice as well as in belief. So he fell asleep and awoke when it was night again, and ate and drank. In this way he journeyed several days until he began to see the hill country which borders the desert towards Riad, and he understood that he had been much farther away than he had imagined. But he reflected that Allah had doubtless intended to try his constancy by imposing upon him the journey through the desert during the days of fasting. But at last, he awoke one day just at sunset, instead of sleeping until the night. He had been travelling up the first slopes where the ground, though barren, is harder than in the desert, and had lain down in a hollow by an abundant spring. He rose now and made ablutions and prayed, as usual, towards Mecca; that is to say, being where he was, he turned his face to the west as the sun was setting. When he had finished he stood some minutes watching the red light over the desert below him, and then he was suddenly aware that the new moon was hanging just above the diminishing fire

of the evening, and he knew that the fast of Ramadhan was over and that the feast of Bairam had begun. Thereat he was glad and determined to take an unusual number of locusts for his evening meal.

But when he looked about he saw that there were no locusts in the place, though there was grass, which his mare was eating. Then he looked everywhere near the well to see whether some traveller had not perhaps dropped a few dates or a little barley by accident, but there was nothing.

"Doubtless," he said, "Allah wishes to show me that greediness is a sin even on the day of feasting."

He drank as much of the water as he could in order to stay his hunger as well as assuage his thirst, and then he saddled the mare and rode up out of the hollow towards the hill country. Towards the middle of the night he came to a small village where all the people were celebrating the feast, having killed a young camel and several sheep. Seeing that he was a traveller they bade him be welcome, and he sat down among them and ate his fill of meat, praising Allah. And corn was given to his mare, so that the dumb animal also kept the feast.

"Truly," said the people, "thy mare is a daughter of Al Borak, the heavenly steed called 'the Lightning,' upon which the nocturnal journey was accomplished by the Prophet, upon whom be peace."

They said this not because they divined that the mare had been given to Khaled by an angel, but because they saw by her beauty that she must be swift

as the wind. For she had a large head, with bony cheeks, and a full forehead and round black eyes wide apart, with smooth black skin about them, and a pointed nose, and the under lip was like that of a camel, projecting a little. And she was neither too long nor too short, having straight legs like steel, and small feet and round hoofs, neither overgrown in idleness nor overworn with much work. And her tail lay flat and long and smooth when she was standing still but arched like the plume of an ostrich when she moved. Her coat was bright bay, glossy and smooth and without any white markings. By all these signs, which belong to the purest blood, the people of the village knew that she was of the fleetest reared in Arabia. And Khaled was glad that the people admired her, since she was the chief of his few possessions, which indeed were not many.

He did not know beforehand what he should do, nor what he should say when in the presence of the Sultan of Nejed, still less how he could venture to ask Zehowah in marriage, having no gifts to offer and not being himself a prince. Before he had become a man it would have been easy for him to find treasures in the earth such as men had never seen, for, like all the genii, he had been acquainted with the most deeply hidden mines and with all places where men had hidden wealth in old times. But this knowledge does not belong to the intelligence becoming mortals, but rather to the faculty of seeing through solid substance which is exercised by the spirits of the air, and in his present state it was taken from him, together with all possibility

of communicating with his former companions. He had nothing but his mare and his sword and the garments he wore, and though the mare was indeed a gift for a king he did not know whether he was meant to offer it to any one, seeing that it had been given him by an angel.

Nevertheless he did not lose heart, for the celestial messenger had told him that by the will of Allah he should marry Zehowah, and Allah was certainly able to give him a king's daughter in marriage without the aid of gifts, of gold, of musk, of 'Ood, of aloes or of pearls.

He rose, therefore, when he had eaten enough and had rested himself and his mare, and after thanking the people of the village for their entertainment he rode on his way. He passed through a hill country, sometimes fertile and sometimes stony and deserted, but he found water by the way and such food as he needed; and accomplished the remainder of the journey without hindrance.

On the morning of the second day he came to a halting-place from which he could see the city of Riad, and he was astonished at the size and magnificence of the Sultan's palace, which was visible above the walls of the fortification. Yet he was aware that he had seen all this before, as in a dream not altogether forgotten when a man wakes at dawn after a long and restless night.

He gazed awhile, after he had made his ablutions, and then calling to his mare to come to him, he mounted and rode through the southern gate into the heart of the city.

CHAPTER II

When Khaled reached the palace he dismounted from his mare, and leading her by the bridle entered the gateway. Here he met many persons, guards, and slaves both black and white, and porters bearing provisions, and a few women, all hurrying hither and thither; and many noticed him, but a few gazed curiously into his face, and two or three grooms followed him a little way, pointing out to each other the beauties of his mare.

"Truly," they said, "if we did not know the mares of the stud better than the faces of our mothers, we should swear by Allah that this beast had been stolen from the Sultan's stables by a thief in the night, for she is of the best blood in Nejed."

These being curious they saluted Khaled and asked him whence he came and whither he was going, seeing that it is not courteous to ask a stranger any other questions.

"I come from the Red Desert," Khaled answered, "and I am going into the palace as you see."

The grooms saw that there was a rebuke in the last part of his answer and hung back and presently went their way.

"Are such mares bred in the Red Desert?" they exclaimed. "The stranger is doubtless the sheikh of

some powerful tribe. But if this be true, where are the men that came with him? And why is he dressed like a man of the city?"

So they hastened out of the gateway to find the Bedouins who, they supposed, must have accompanied Khaled on his journey.

But Khaled went forward and came to a great court in which were stone seats by the walls. Here a number of people were waiting. So he sat down upon one of the seats and his mare laid her nose upon his shoulder as though inquiring what he would do.

"Allah knows," Khaled said, as though answering her. So he waited patiently.

At last a man came out into the courtyard who was richly dressed, and whom all the people saluted as he passed. But he came straight towards Khaled, who rose from his seat.

"Whence come you, my friend?" he inquired, after they had exchanged the salutation.

"From the Red Desert, and I desire permission to speak with the Sultan when it shall please his majesty to see me."

"And what do you desire of his majesty? I ask that I may inform him beforehand. So you will have a better reception."

"Tell the Sultan," said Khaled, "that a man is here who has neither father nor mother nor any possessions beyond a swift mare, a keen sword and a strong hand, but who is come nevertheless to ask in marriage Zehowah, the Sultan's daughter."

The minister smiled and gazed at Khaled in silence for a moment, but when he had looked keenly at his face, he became grave.

"It may be," he thought, "that this is some great prince who comes thus simply as in a disguise, and it were best not to anger him."

"I will deliver your message," he answered aloud, "though it is a strange one. It is customary for those who come to ask for a maiden in marriage to bring gifts — and to receive others in return," he added.

"I neither bring gifts nor ask any," said Khaled. "Allah is great and will provide me with what I need."

"I fear that he will not provide you with the Sultan's daughter for a wife," said the minister, as he went away, but Khaled did not hear the words, though he would have cared little if he had.

Now it chanced that Zehowah was sitting in a balcony surrounded with lattice, over the courtyard, on that morning and she had seen Khaled enter, leading his mare by the bridle. But though she watched the stranger and his beast idly for some time she thought as little of the one as of the other, for her heart was not turned to love, and she knew nothing of horses. But her women thought differently and spoke loudly, praising the beauty of both.

"There is indeed a warrior able to fight in the front of our armies," they said. "Truly such a man must have been Khaled ibn Walad, the Sword of the Lord, in the days of the Prophet — upon whom peace."

By and by there was a cry that the Sultan was com-

ing into the room, and the women rose and retired. The Sultan sat down upon the carpet by his daughter, in the balcony.

"Do you see that stranger, holding a beautiful mare by the bridle?" he asked.

"Yes, I see him," answered Zehowah, indifferently.

"He is come to ask you in marriage."

"Another!" she exclaimed with a careless laugh. "If it is the will of Allah I will marry him. If not, he will go away like the rest."

"This man is not like the rest, my daughter. He is either a madman or some powerful prince in disguise."

"Or both, perhaps," laughed Zehowah. She laughed often, for although she was not inclined to love, she was of a gentle and merry temper.

"His message was a strange one," said the Sultan. "He says that he neither brings gifts nor asks them, that he has neither father nor mother, nor any possessions excepting a swift mare, a keen sword and a strong hand."

"I see the mare, the sword and the hand," answered Zehowah. "But the hand is like any other hand — how can I tell whether it be strong? The sword is in its sheath, and I cannot see its edge, and though the mare is pretty enough, I have seen many of your own I liked as well. The elephants of the Indian prince were more amusing, and the prince himself was more beautiful than this stranger with his black beard and his solemn face."

"That is true," said the Sultan, with a sigh.

"Do you wish me to marry this man?" Zehowah asked.

"My daughter, I wish you to choose of your own free will. Nevertheless I trust that you will choose before long, that I may see my child's children before I die."

For the Sultan was old and white-bearded, and was already somewhat bowed with advancing years and with burden of many cares and the fatigues of many wars. Yet his eye was bright and his heart fearless still, though his judgment was often weak and vacillating.

"Do you wish me to marry this man?" Zehowah asked again. "He will be a strange husband, for he is a strange suitor, coming without gifts and having neither father nor mother. But I will do as you command. If you leave it to me I shall never marry."

"I did not say that I desired you to take this one especially," protested the Sultan, "though for the matter of gifts I care little, since heaven has sent me wealth in abundance. But my remaining years are few, and the years of life are like stones slipping from a mountain which move slowly at first, and then faster until they outrun the lightning and leap into the dark valley below. And what is required of a husband is that he be a true believer, young and whole in every part, and of a charitable disposition."

"Truly," laughed Zehowah, "if he have no possessions, charity will avail him little, since he has nothing to give."

"There is other charity besides the giving of alms,

my daughter, since it is charity even to think charitably of others, as you know. But I have not said that you should marry this man, for you are free. And indeed I have not yet talked with him. But I have sent for him and you shall hear him speak. See — they are just now conducting him to the hall of audiences. But indeed I think he is no husband for you, after all."

The Sultan rose and went to receive Khaled, and Zehowah went to the secret window above her father's raised seat in the hall.

Khaled made the customary salutation with the greatest respect, and the Sultan made him sit down at his right hand as though he had been a prince, and asked him whence he had come. Then a refreshment was brought, and Khaled ate and drank a little, after which the Sultan inquired his business.

"I come," said Khaled, boldly, "to ask your daughter Zehowah in marriage. I bring no gifts, for I have none to offer, nor have I any inheritance. My mare is my fortune, my sword is my argument and my wit is in my arm."

"You are a strange suitor," said the Sultan; but he kept a pleasant countenance, since Khaled was his guest. "You are no doubt the sheikh of a tribe of the Red Desert, though I was not aware that any tribes dwelt there."

"So far as being the sheikh of my tribe," said Khaled, with a smile, "your majesty may call me so, for my tribe consists of myself alone, seeing that I have neither father nor mother nor any relations."

"Truly, I have never talked with such a suitor before," answered the Sultan. "At least I presume that you are a son of some prince, and that you have chosen to disguise yourself as a rich traveller and to hide your history under an allegory."

The Sultan would certainly not have allowed himself to overstep the bounds of courtesy so far, but for his astonishment at Khaled's daring manner. He was too keen, however, not to see that this man was something above the ordinary and that, whatever else he might be, he was not a common impostor. Such a fellow would have found means to rob a caravan of valuable goods, to offer as gifts, would have brought himself a train of camels and slaves, and would have given himself out as a prince of some distant country from which it would not be possible to obtain information.

"Istaghfir Allah! I am no prince," Khaled answered. "I ask for the hand of your daughter. The will of Allah will be accomplished."

He knew that Zehowah was watching and listening behind the lattice in her place of concealment, for the memory of such things had not been taken from him when he had lost the supernatural vision of the genii and had become an ordinary man. He was determined therefore to be truthful and to say nothing which he might afterwards be called upon to explain. For he never doubted but that Zehowah would be his wife, since the angel had told him that it should be so.

"And what if I refuse even to consider your pro-

posal?" inquired the Sultan, to see what he would say.

"If it is the will of Allah that I marry your daughter, your refusal would be useless, but if it is not his will, your refusal would be altogether unnecessary."

The Sultan was much struck by this argument, which showed a ready wit in the stranger, and which he could only have opposed by asserting that his own will was superior to that of heaven itself.

"But," said he, defending himself, "any of the previous suitors might have said the same."

"Undoubtedly," replied Khaled, unabashed. "But they did not say it. Your majesty will certainly now consider the matter."

"In the meanwhile," the Sultan answered, very graciously, "you are my guest, and you have come in time to take part in the third day of the feast, to which you are welcome in the name of Allah, the merciful."

Thereupon the Sultan rose and Khaled was conducted to the apartments set apart for the guests. But the Sultan returned to the harem in a very thoughtful mood, and before long he found Zehowah, who had returned to her seat in the balcony.

"This is a very strange suitor," he said, shaking his head and looking into his daughter's face.

"He is at least bold and outspoken," she answered. "He makes no secret of his poverty nor of his wishes. Whatever he be, he is in earnest and speaks truth. I would like well to know the only secret which he wishes to keep — who he really is."

"It may be," said the Sultan, thoughtfully, "that if I threaten to cut off his head he will tell us. But on the other hand, he is a guest."

"He is not of those who are easily terrified, I think. Tell me, my father, do you wish me to marry him?"

"How could you marry a man who has no family and no inheritance? Would such a marriage befit the daughter of kings?"

"Why not?" asked Zehowah, with much calmness.

The Sultan stared at her in astonishment.

"Has this stranger enchanted your imagination?" he inquired by way of answer.

"No," replied Zehowah, scornfully. "I have seen the noblest, the most beautiful and the richest of the earth, ready to take me to wife, and I have not loved. Shall I love an outcast?"

"Then how can you ask my wishes?"

"Because there are good reasons why I should marry this man."

"Good reasons? In the name of Allah let me hear them, if there are any."

"You are old, my father," said Zehowah, "and it has not pleased heaven to send you a son, nor to leave you any living relation to sit upon the throne when your years are accomplished. You must needs think of your successor."

"The better reason for choosing some powerful prince, whose territory shall increase the kingdom he inherits from me, and whose alliance shall strengthen the empire I leave behind me."

"Istaghfir Allah! The worse reason. For such a prince would be attached to his own country, and would take me thither with him and would neglect the kingdom of Nejed, regarding it as a land of strangers whom he may oppress with taxes to increase his own splendour. And this is not unreasonable, since no king can wisely govern two kingdoms separated from each other by more than three days' journey. No man can have other than the one of two reasons for asking me in marriage. Either he has heard of me and desires to possess me, or he wishes to increase his dominions by the inheritance which will be mine."

"Doubtless, this is the truth," said the Sultan. "But so much the more does this stranger in all probability covet my kingdom, since he has nothing of his own."

"This is what I mean. For, having no other possessions to distract his attention, he will remain always here, and will govern your kingdom for its own advantage in order that it may profit himself."

"This is a subtle argument, my daughter, and one requiring consideration."

"The more so because the man seems otherwise well fitted to be my husband, since he is a true believer, and young, and fearless and outspoken."

"But if this is all," objected the Sultan, "there are in Nejed several young men, sons of my chief courtiers, who possess the same qualifications. Choose one of them."

"On the contrary, to choose one of them would arouse

the jealousy of all the rest, with their families and slaves and freedmen, whereby the kingdom would easily be exposed to civil war. But if I take a stranger it is more probable that all will be for him, since you are beloved, and there is no reason why one party should oppose him and another support him, since none of them know anything of him."

"But he will not be beloved by the people unless he is liberal, and he has nothing wherewith to be generous."

"And where are the treasures of Riad?" laughed Zehowah. "Is it not easy for you to go secretly to his chamber and to give him as much gold as he needs?"

"That is also true. I see that you have set your heart upon him."

"Not my heart, my father, but my head. For I have infinitely more head than heart, and I see that the welfare of the kingdom will be better secured with such a ruler, than it would have been under a foreign prince whose right hand would be perpetually thrust out to take in Nejed that which his left hand would throw to courtiers in his own country. Do I speak wisdom or folly?"

"It is neither all folly nor all wisdom."

"I have seen this man, I have heard him speak," said Zehowah. "He is as well as another, since I must marry sooner or later. Moreover, I have another argument."

"What is that?"

"Either he is a man strong enough to rule me, or he

is not," Zehowah answered with a laugh. "If he can govern me, he can govern the kingdom of Nejed. But if not, I will govern it for him, and rule him also."

The Sultan looked up to heaven and slightly raised his hands from his knees.

"Allah is merciful and forgiving!" he exclaimed. "Is this the spirit befitting a wife?"

"Is it charity to cause happiness?"

"Undoubtedly it is charity."

"And which is greater, the happiness of many or the happiness of one?"

"The happiness of many is greater," answered the Sultan. "What then?" he asked after a time, seeing that she said nothing more.

"I have spoken," she replied. "It is best that I should marry him."

Then there was silence for a long time, during which the Sultan sat quite motionless in his place, watching his daughter, while she looked idly through the lattice at the people who came and went in the court below. She seemed to feel no emotion.

The Sultan did not know how to oppose Zehowah's will any more than he could answer her arguments, although his worldly wisdom was altogether at variance with her decision. For she was the beloved child of his old age and he could refuse her nothing. Moreover, in what she had said, there was much which recommended itself to his judgment, though by no means enough to persuade him. At last he rose from the carpet and embraced her.

"If it is your will, let it be so," he said.

"It is the will of Allah," answered Zehowah. "Let it be accomplished immediately."

With a sigh the Sultan withdrew and sent a messenger to Khaled requesting him to come to another and more secluded chamber, where they could be alone and talk freely.

Khaled showed no surprise on hearing that his suit was accepted, but he thought it fitting to express much gratitude for the favourable decision. Then the Sultan, who did not wish to seem too readily yielding, began to explain to Khaled Zehowah's reasons for accepting a poor stranger, presenting them as though they were his own.

"For," he said, "whatever you may in reality be, you have chosen to present yourself to us in such a manner as would not have failed to bring about a refusal under any other circumstances. But I have considered that as it will be your destiny, if heaven grants you life, to rule my kingdom after me, you will in all likelihood rule it more wisely and carefully, for having no other cares in a distant country to distract your attention; and because you have no relations you are the less liable to the attacks of open or secret jealousy."

The Sultan then gave him a large sum of money in gold pieces, which Khaled gladly accepted, since he had not even wherewithal to buy himself a garment for the wedding feast, still less to distribute gifts to the courtiers and to the multitude. The Sultan also presented him with a black slave to attend to his personal wants.

Khaled then sent for merchants from the bazaar, and they brought him all manner of rich stuffs, such as he needed. There came also two tailors, who sat down upon a matting in his apartment and immediately began to make him clothes, while the black slave sat beside them and watched them, lest they should steal any of the gold of the embroideries.

When it was known in the palace that the Sultan's only daughter was to be married at once, there were great rejoicings, and many camels were slaughtered and a great number of sheep, to supply food for so great a feast. A number of cooks were hired also to help those who belonged to the palace, for although the Sultan fed daily more than three hundred persons, guests, travellers and poor, besides all the members of the household, yet this was as nothing compared with the multitude to be provided for on the present occasion.

Then it was that Hadji Mohammed, the chief of the cooks, sat down upon the floor in the midst of the main kitchen and beat his breast and wept. For the confusion was great so that the voice of one man could not be heard for the diabolical screaming of the many, and the cooks smote the young lads who helped them, and these, running to escape from the blows, fell against the porters who came in from outside bearing sacks of sugar, and great baskets of fruit, and quarters of meat and skins of water, and bushels of meal and a hundred other things equally necessary to the cooking; and the porters, staggering under their burdens, fell between the legs of the mules loaded with firewood, that had

been brought to the gate, and the dumb beasts kicked violently in all directions, while the slaves who drove them struck them with their staves, and the mules began to run among the camels, and the camels, being terrified, rose from the ground and began to plunge and skip like young foals, while more porters and more mules and more slaves came on in multitudes to the door of the kitchen. And it was very hot, for it was noontide, and in summer, and there were flies without number, and the dogs that had been sleeping in the shade sprang up and barked loudly and bit whomsoever they could reach, and all the men bellowed together, so that the confusion was extreme.

"Verily," cried Hadji Mohammed, "this is not a kitchen, but Yemamah, and I am not the chief of the cooks, but the chief of sinners and fuel for hell." So he wept bitterly and beat his breast.

But at last matters mended, for there were many who were willing to do well, so that when the time came Hadji Mohammed was able to serve an honourable feast to all, though the number of the guests was not less than two thousand.

But Khaled, having visited the bath, arrayed himself magnificently and rode upon his bay mare to the mosque, surrounded by the courtiers and the chief officers of the state, and by a great throng of slaves from the palace. As he rode, he scattered gold pieces among the people from the bags which he carried, and all praised his liberality and swore by Allah that Zehowah was taking a very goodly husband. And as none knew

whence he came, all were equally pleased, but most of all the Bedouins from the desert, of whom there were many at that time in Riad, who had come to keep the feast Bairam, for Khaled's own words had been repeated, and they had heard that he came from the desert like themselves. And when he had finished his prayers, he rode back to the palace.

When the time for the feast came the Sultan led Khaled into the great hall and made him sit at his right hand. The Sultan himself was magnificently dressed and covered with priceless jewels, so that he shone like the sun among all the rest. Then he presented Khaled to the assembly.

"This," said he, "is Khaled, my beloved son-in-law, the husband of my only daughter, whom it has pleased Allah to send me, as the stay of my old age and as the successor to my kingdom. He will be terrible in war as Khaled ibn Walid, his namesake, the Sword of the Lord, and gentle and just in peace as Abu Bakr of blessed memory. He is as brave as the lion, as strong as the camel, as swift as the ostrich, as sagacious as the fox and as generous as the pelican, who feeds her young with the blood of her own breast. Love him therefore, as you have loved me, for he is extremely worthy of affection, and hate his enemies and be faithful to him in the time of danger. By the blessing of Allah he shall rear up children to me in my old age, to be with you when he is gone."

Thereupon Khaled turned and answered, speaking modestly but with much dignity in his manner.

"Ye men of Nejed, this is my marriage feast and I invite you all to be merry with me. Whether it shall please Allah to give me a long life, or whether it shall please him to take me this night I know not. We are in the hand of Allah. But this I do know. I will love you as my own people, seeing that I have no people of my own. I will fight for you as a man fights for his own soul, for his wife and for his children, and I will divide justly the spoils in war, and give in peace whatsoever I am able, to all those who are in need. I swear by Allah! You are all witnesses."

The courtiers and all the guests were much pleased with this short speech, for they saw that Khaled was a man of few words and not proud or overbearing, and none could look into his face and doubt his promise. For the present moment at least Zehowah's prediction had been verified, for no one was jealous of him, and there was but one party among them all and that was for him. So they all feasted together in harmony until the sun was low.

In the meantime Zehowah remained in the harem, surrounded by her women, and a separate meal was brought to them. They all sat upon the rich carpets leaning on cushions set against the walls, and small low tables were brought in, covered with dishes and bowls containing delicately prepared rice and mutton in great abundance and fresh blanket bread, hot from the stones, and olives brought from Syria. Afterwards came sweetmeats without number, such as Hadji Mohammed knew how to prepare, and gold and silver

goblets filled with a drink made from large sweet lemons and water, which is called "treng." Zehowah indeed ate sparingly, for she was accustomed to such dainties every day, but her women were delighted with the abundance and left nothing to be taken away.

While they were eating, six of the women played upon musical instruments by turns, while others danced slow and graceful measures, singing as they moved, and describing the unspeakable happiness which awaited their princess in marriage. Afterwards when the tables had been taken away and they had washed their hands with rose water from Ajjem, Zehowah commanded the singing and the dancing to cease, and the women brought her one by one the dresses which she was to wear before Khaled. They were very magnificent, for it had needed many years to prepare them, and a great weight of gold and silver threads had been weighed out to the tailors and embroiderers who had worked in the preparation of them ever since Zehowah had been two years old. For the piece of material is weighed first, and then the gold, and afterwards, when the work is finished, the whole is weighed together, lest the tailors should steal anything.

But Zehowah looked coldly at the garments, one after the other, as they were brought and taken away, and the women fancied that she was to be married to the stranger against her will, and that she remembered the Indian prince.

"It is a pity," one of them ventured to say, "that the bridegroom has not brought any elephants with

him, for we would have watched them from the balconies, since they are diverting beasts."

"And it is a pity," said Zehowah, scornfully, "that my husband has not a round, soft face, like the moon in May, and the eyes of a gazelle and the heart of a hare. Truly, such a one would have made you a good king, seeing that he was also an unbeliever!"

"Nay," said the woman, humbly, "Allah forbid that I should make a comparison, or bring an ill omen on the day by speaking of that which chanced a year ago. Truly, I only spoke of elephants, and not of men. For, surely, we all said when we saw him in the court that he looked a brave warrior and a goodly man."

Then a messenger came from the Sultan saying that it was time to make ready. So they went to another apartment, where the nuptial chamber had been prepared. The Sultan came, then, leading Khaled, and followed by the Kadi, and all the women veiled themselves while the latter read the declaration of marriage. After that they all withdrew and Khaled took his seat upon the high couch in the middle of the room. Presently all the women returned, unveiled, with loud singing and playing of instruments, leading Zehowah dressed in the first of the dresses which she was to put on, and which, though it was very splendid, was of course the least magnificent of all those which had been prepared. But Khaled sat in his place looking on quietly, for he was acquainted with the custom, and he cared little for the rich garments, but looked always into Zehowah's face.

CHAPTER III

KHALED sat with his sword upon his feet, and when Zehowah was not in the room he played with the hilt and thought of all that was happening.

"Truly," he said to himself, "Allah is great. Was I not, but a few days since, one of the genii condemned to perish at the day of the resurrection? And am I not now a man, married to the most beautiful woman in the whole world, and the wisest and the best, needing only to be loved by her in order to obtain an undying soul? And why should this woman not love me? Truly, we shall see before long, when this mummery is finished."

So he sat on the couch while Zehowah was led before him again and again, each time in clothing more splendid than before, and each time with new songs and new music. But at the last time the attendants left her standing before him and went away, and only a very old woman remained at the door, screaming out in a cracked voice the customary exhortations. Then she, too, went away and the door was shut and Khaled and Zehowah were alone.

It was now near the middle of the night. The chamber was large and high, lighted by a number of hanging lamps such as are made in Bagdad, of brass perforated with beautiful designs and filled with

coloured glasses, in each of which a little wick floats upon oil. Upon the walls rich carpets were hung, both Arabian and Persian, some taken in war as booty, and some brought by merchants in time of peace. A brass chafing dish stood at some distance from the couch, and upon the coals the women had thrown powdered myrrh and benzoin before they went away. But Khaled cared little for these things, since he had seen all the treasures of the earth in their most secret depositories.

Zehowah had watched him narrowly during the ceremony of the dresses and had seen that he felt no surprise at anything which was brought before him.

"His own country must be full of great wealth and magnificence," she thought, "since so much treasure does not astonish him." And she was disappointed.

Now that they were alone, he still sat in silence, gazing at her as she stood beside him, and not even thinking of any speech, for he was overcome and struck dumb by her eyes.

"You are not pleased with what I have shown you," Zehowah said at last in a tone of displeasure and disappointment. "And yet you have seen the wealth of my father's palace."

"I have seen neither wealth nor treasure, neither rich garments, nor precious stones nor chains of gold nor embroideries of pearls," Khaled answered slowly.

But Zehowah frowned and tapped the carpet impatiently with her foot where she stood, for she was annoyed, having expected him to praise the beauty of her many dresses.

"They who have eyes can see," she said. "But if you are not pleased, my father will give me a hundred dresses more beautiful than these, and pearls and jewels without end."

"I should not see them," Khaled replied. "I have seen two jewels which have dazzled me so that I can see nothing else."

Zehowah gazed at him with a look of inquiry.

"I have seen the eyes of Zehowah," he continued, "which are as the stars Sirius and Aldebaran, when they are over the desert in the nights of winter. What jewels can you show me like these?"

Then Zehowah laughed softly and sat down beside her husband on the edge of the couch.

"Nevertheless," she said, "the dresses are very rich. You might admire them also."

"I will look at them when you are not near me, for then my sight will be restored for other things."

Khaled took her hand in his and held it.

"Tell me, Zehowah, will you love me?" he asked in a soft voice.

"You are my lord and my master," she answered, looking modestly downward, and her hand lay quite still.

She was so very beautiful that as Khaled sat beside her and looked at her downcast face, and knew that she was his, he could not easily believe that she was cold and indifferent to him.

"By Allah!" he thought, "can it be so hard to get a woman's love? Truly, I think she begins to love me already."

Zehowah looked up and smiled carelessly as though answering his question, but Khaled was obliged to admit in his heart that the answer lacked clearness, for he found it no easier to interpret a woman's smile than men had found it before him, and have found it since, even to this day.

"You have had many suitors," he said at last, "and it is said that your father has given you your own free choice, allowing you to see them and hear them speak while he was receiving them. Tell me why you have chosen me rather than the rest, unless it is because you love me? For I came with empty hands, and without servants or slaves, or retinue of any kind, riding alone out of the Red Desert. It was therefore for myself that you took me."

"You are right. It was for yourself that I took you."

"Then it was for love of me, was it not?"

"There were and still are many and good reasons," answered Zehowah, calmly, and at the same time withdrawing her hand from his and smoothing back the black hair from her forehead. "I told them all to my father, and he was convinced."

"Tell them to me also," said Khaled.

So she explained all to him in detail, making him see everything as she saw it herself. And the explanation was so very clear, that Khaled felt a cold chill in his heart as he understood that she had chosen him rather for politic reasons, than because she wished him for her husband.

"And yet," she added at the end, "it was the will of Allah, for otherwise I would not have chosen you."

"But surely," he said, somewhat encouraged by these last words, "there was some love in the choice, too."

"How can I tell!" she exclaimed, with a little laugh. "What is love?"

Finding himself confronted by such an amazing question, Khaled was silent, and took her hand again. For though many have asked what love is, no one has ever been able to find an answer in words to satisfy the questioner, seeing that the answer can have no more to do with words than love itself, a matter sufficiently explained by a certain wise man, who understood the heart of man. If, said he, a man who loves a woman, or a woman who loves a man, could give in words the precise reason why he or she loves, then love itself could be defined in language; but as no man or woman has ever succeeded in doing this, I infer that they who love best do not themselves know in what love consists — still less therefore can any one else know, wherefore the definition is impossible, and no one need waste time in trying to find it.

A certain wit has also said that although it be impossible for any man to explain the nature of love to many persons at the same time, he generally finds it easy to make his explanations to one person only. But this is a mere quibbling jest and not deserving of any attention.

Zehowah expected an answer to her question, and Khaled was silent, not because he was as yet too little acquainted with the feelings of a man to give them

expression, but because he already felt so much that it was hard for him to speak at all.

Zehowah laughed and shook her head, for she was not of a timid temper.

"How can you expect me to say that I love you, when you yourself are unable to answer such a simple question?" she asked. "And besides, are you not my lord and my master? What is it then to you, whether I love you or not?"

But again Khaled was silent, debating whether he should tell her the truth, how the angel had promised in Allah's name that if she loved him he should obtain an undying soul, and how the task of obtaining her love had been laid upon him as a sort of atonement for having slain the Indian prince. But as he reflected he understood that this would probably estrange her all the more from him.

"Yet I can answer your question," he said at last. "What is love? It is that which is in me for you only."

"But how am I to know what that is?" asked Zehowah, drawing up the smooth gold bracelets upon her arm and letting them fall down to her wrist, so that they jangled like a camel's bell.

"If you love me you will know," Khaled answered, "for then, perhaps, you will feel a tenth part of what I feel."

"And why not all that you feel?" she asked, looking at him, but still playing with the bracelets.

"Because it is impossible for any woman to love as much as I love you, Zehowah."

"You mean, perhaps, that a woman is too weak to love so well," she suggested. "And you think, perhaps, that we are weak because we sit all our lives upon the carpets in the harem eating sweetmeats, and listening to singing girls and to old women who tell us tales of long ago. Yet there have been strong women too — as strong as men. Kenda, who tore out the heart of Kamsa — was she weak?"

"Women are stronger to hate than to love," said Khaled.

"But a man can forget his hatred in the love of a woman, and his strength also," laughed Zehowah. "I would rather that you should not love me at all, than that you should forget to be strong in the day of battle. For I have married you that you may lead my people to war and bring home the spoil."

"And if I destroy all your enemies and the enemies of your people, will you love me then, Zehowah?"

"Why should I love you then, more than now? What has war to do with love? Again, I ask, what is it to you whether I love you or not? Am I not your wife, and are you not my master? What is this love of which you talk? Is it a rich garment that you can wear? A precious stone that you can fasten in your turban? A rich carpet to spread in your house? A treasure of gold, a mountain of ambergris, a bushel of pearls from Oman? Why do you covet it? Am I not beautiful enough? Then is love henna to make my hair bright, or kohl to darken my eyes, or a boiled egg with almonds to smooth my face? I

have all these things, and ointments from Egypt, and perfumes from Syria, and if I am not beautiful enough to please you, it is the will of Allah, and love will not make me fairer."

"Yet love is beauty," Khaled answered. "For Kadijah was lovely in the eyes of the Prophet, upon whom be peace, because she loved him, though she was a widow and old."

"Am I a widow? Am I old?" asked Zehowah, with some indignation. "Do I need the imaginary cosmetic you call love to smooth my wrinkles, to lighten my eyes, or to make my teeth white?"

"No. You need nothing to make you beautiful."

"And for the matter of that, I can say it of you. You tell me that you love me. Is it love that makes your body tall and straight, your beard black, your forehead smooth, your hand strong? Would not any woman see what I see, whether you loved her or not? See! Is your hand whiter than mine because you love and I do not?"

She laughed again as she held her hand beside his.

"Truly," thought Khaled, "it is less easy than I supposed. For the heart of a woman who does not love is like the desert when the wind blows over it and there are neither tracks nor landmarks. And I am wandering in this desert like a man seeking lost camels."

But he said nothing, for he was not yet skilled in the arguments of love. Thereupon Zehowah smiled,

and resting her cheek upon her hand, looked into his face, as though saying scornfully, "Is it not all vanity and folly?"

Khaled sighed, for he was disappointed, as a thirsty man who, coming to drink of a clear spring, finds the water bitter, while his thirst increases and grows unbearable.

"Why do you sigh?" Zehowah asked, after a little silence. "Are you weary? Are you tired with the feasting? Are you full of bitterness, because I do not love you? Command me and I will obey. Are you not my lord to whom I am subject?"

He did not speak, but she drew him to her, so that his head rested upon her bosom, and she began to sing to him in a low voice.

For a long time Khaled kept his eyes shut, listening to her voice. Then, on a sudden, he looked up, and without speaking so much as a word, he clasped her in his arms and kissed her.

Before it was day there was a great tumult in the streets of Riad, of which the noise came up even to the chamber where Khaled and Zehowah were sleeping. Zehowah awoke and listened, wondering what had happened and trying to understand the cries of the distant multitude. Then she laid her hand upon Khaled's forehead and waked him.

"What is it?" he asked.

"It is war," she answered. "The enemy have surprised the city in the night of the feast. Arise and take arms and go out to the people."

Khaled sprang up and in a moment he was clothed and had girt on his sword. Then he took Zehowah in his arms.

"While I live, you are safe," he said.

"Am I afraid? Go quickly," she answered.

At that time the Sultan of Nejed was at war with the northern tribes of Shammar, and the enemy had taken advantage of the month of Ramadhan, in which few persons travel, to advance in great numbers to Riad. During the three days' feast of Bairam they had moved on every night, slaying the inhabitants of the villages so that not one had escaped to bring the news, and in the daytime they had hidden themselves wherever they could find shelter. But in the night in which Khaled and Zehowah were married they reached the very walls of the city, and waiting until all the people were asleep, a party of them had climbed up upon the ramparts and had opened one of the gates to their companions after killing the guards.

Khaled found his mare and mounted her without saddle or bridle in his haste, then drawing his sabre he rode swiftly out of the palace into the confusion. The enemy with their long spears were driving the panic-stricken guards and the shrieking people before them towards the palace, slaughtering all whom they overtook, so that the gutters of the streets were already flowing with blood, and the horses of the enemy stumbled over the bodies of the defenders. The whole multitude of the pursued and the pursuers were just breaking out of the principal street into the open space

before the palace when Khaled met them, a single man facing ten thousand.

"I shall certainly perish in this fight," he said to himself, "and yet I shall not receive the reward of the faithful, since Allah has not given me a soul. Nevertheless certain of these dogs shall eat dirt before the rest get into the palace."

So he pressed his legs to the bare sides of his mare and lifted up his sword and rode at the foe, having neither buckler, nor helmet, nor shirt of mail to protect him, but only his clothes and his turban. But his arm was strong, and it has been said by the wise that it is better to fall upon an old lion with a reed than to stand armed in the way of a man who seeks death.

"Yallah! The Sword of the Lord!" shouted Khaled, in such a terrible voice that the assailants ceased to kill for a moment, and the terrified guards turned to see whence so great a voice could proceed; and some who had seen Khaled recognised him and ran to meet him, and the others followed.

When the enemy saw a single man riding towards them across the great square before the palace, they sent up a shout of derision, and turned again to the slaughter of such of the inhabitants as could not extricate themselves.

"Shall one man stop an army?" they said. "Shall a fox turn back a herd of hyænas?"

But when Khaled was among them they found less matter for laughter. For the sword was keen, the mare was swift to double and turn, and Khaled's hand

was strong. In the twinkling of an eye two of the enemy lay dead, the one cloven to the chin, the other headless.

Then a strange fever seized Khaled, such as he had not heard of, and all things turned to scarlet before his eyes, both the walls of the houses, and the faces and the garments of his foes. Men who saw him say that his face was white and shining in the dawn, and that the flashing of the sword was like a storm of lightning about his head, and after each flash there was a great rain of blood, and a crashing like thunder as the horses and men of the enemy fell to the earth.

In the meantime, too, the soldiers of the city and the Bedouins of the desert who were within the walls for the feast took courage, and turning fiercely began to drive the assailants back by the way they had come, towards the market-place in the bazaar. But those behind still kept pressing forward while those in front were driven back, and the press became so great that the Shammars could no longer wield their weapons. The enemy were crowded together like sheep in a fold, and Khaled, with his men, began to cut a broad road through the very midst of them, hewing them down in ranks and throwing them aside, as corn is harvested in Egypt.

But after some time Khaled saw that he was alone, with a few followers, surrounded by a great throng of the enemy, for some of his men had been slain after slaying many of their foes, and some had not been able to follow, being hindered at first by the heaps of dead

and afterwards by the multitude of their opponents who closed in again over the bloody way through which Khaled had passed.

And now the Shammars saw that Khaled could not escape them, and they pressed him on every side, but the archers dared not shoot at him for fear of hitting their own friends, if their arrows chanced to go by the mark. Otherwise he would undoubtedly have perished, since he had no armour, and not even a buckler with which to ward off the darts. But they thrust at him with spears and struck at him with their swords, and wounded him more than once, though he was not conscious of pain or loss of blood, being hot with the fever of the fight. He was hard pressed therefore, and while he smote without ceasing he began to know that unless a speedy rescue came to him, his hour was at hand. From the borders of the market-place, the men of Riad could still see his sword flashing and striking, and they still heard his fierce cry.

He looked about him as he fought, and he saw that he was now almost alone. One after another, the few who had penetrated so far forward with him into the press were overwhelmed by numbers, and fell bleeding from a hundred wounds, till only a score were left, and Khaled saw that unless he could now cut his way free, he must inevitably perish. But the press was stubborn, and a man might as well hope to make his way through a herd of camels crowded together in a narrow street. Then Khaled bethought him of a stratagem. He alone was on horseback, for the enemy's riders had ridden

before, and he had met them in the street leading to the palace, when he had himself slain many, and where the rest were even now falling under the swords of the men of Riad. And the few men who were with him were also all on foot. Therefore looking across the market-place he made as though he saw a great force coming to his assistance, and he shouted with all his breath, while his arm never rested.

"Smite, men of Nejed!" he cried. "For I see the Sultan himself coming to meet us with five hundred horsemen! Smite! Yallah! It is the Sword of the Lord!"

Hearing these words, his men were encouraged, and of the enemy many turned their heads to see the new danger. But being on foot they were hindered from seeing by the throng. Yet so much the more Khaled shouted that the Sultan was coming, and many of the heads that turned to look were not turned back again, but rolled down to the feet of those to whom they had belonged. The brave men who were with Khaled took heart and hewed with all their might, taking up the cry of their leader when they saw that it disconcerted their foes, so that the last took fright, and the panic ran through the whole multitude.

"We shall be slain like sheep, and taken like locusts under a mantle, for we cannot move!" they cried, and they began to press away out of the market-place, forcing their comrades before them into the narrow streets.

But here many perished. For while every man in Riad had taken his sword and had gone out of his

house to fight, the women had dragged up cauldrons of boiling water, and also hand-mill stones, to the roofs, and they scalded and crushed their retreating foes. Then, too, as the market-place was cleared, the soldiers came on from the side of the palace, having slain all that stood in their way and taken most of their horses alive, which alone was a great booty, for there are not many horses in Nejed besides those of the Sultan, though these are the very best and fleetest in all Arabia. But the Shammars of the north are great horse-breeders. So the soldiers mounted and joined Khaled in the pursuit, and a great slaughter followed in the streets, though some of the enemy were able to escape to the gates, and warn those of their fellows who were outside to flee to the hills for safety, leaving much booty behind.

At the time of the second call to prayer Khaled dismounted from his mare in the market-place, and there was not one of the enemy left alive within the walls. Those who remember that day say that there were five thousand dead in the streets in Riad.

Khaled made such ablution as he could, and having prayed and given thanks to Allah, he went back on foot to the palace, his bay mare following him, and thrusting her nose into his hand as he walked. For she was little hurt, and the blood that covered her shoulders and her flanks was not her own. But Khaled had many wounds on him, so that his companions wondered how he was able to walk.

In the court of the palace the Sultan came to meet

him, and fell upon his neck and embraced him, for many messengers had come, from time to time, telling how the fight went, and of the great slaughter. And Khaled smiled, for he thought that he should now win the love of Zehowah.

"Said I not truly that he is as brave as a lion, and as strong as the camel?" cried the Sultan, addressing those who stood in the court. "Has he not scattered our enemies as the wind scatters the sand? Surely he is well called by the name Khaled."

"Forget not your own men," Khaled answered, "for they have shared in the danger and have slain more than I, and deserve the spoil. There was a score of stout fellows with me at the last in the market-place, whose faces I should know again on a cloudy night. They fought as well as I, and it was the will of Allah that their enemies should broil everlastingly and drink boiling water. Let them be rewarded."

"They shall every one have a rich garment and a sum of money, besides their share of the spoil. But as for you, my beloved son, go in and rest, and bind up your wounds, and afterwards there shall be feasting and merriment until the night."

"The enemy is not destroyed yet," answered Khaled. "Command rather that the army make ready for the pursuit, and when I have washed I will arm myself and we will ride out and pursue the dogs until not one of them is left alive, and by the help of Allah we will take all Shammar and lay it under tribute and bring back the women captive. After that we shall feast

more safely, and sleep without fear of being waked by a herd of hyænas in our streets."

"Nay, but you must rest before going upon this expedition," objected the Sultan.

"The true believer will find rest in the grave, and feasting in paradise," answered Khaled.

"This is true. But even the camel must eat and drink on the journey, or both he and his master will perish."

"Let us then eat and drink quickly, that we may the sooner go."

"As you will, let it be," said the Sultan, with a sigh, for he loved feasting and music, being now too old to go out and fight himself as he had formerly done.

Thereupon Khaled went into the harem and returned to Zehowah's apartment. As he went the women gathered round him with cries of gladness and songs of triumph, staunching the blood that flowed from his wounds with their veils and garments as he walked. And others ran before to prepare the bath and to tell Zehowah of his coming.

When she saw him she ran forward and took him by the hands and led him in, and herself she bathed his wounds and bound them up with precious balsams of great healing power, not suffering any of the women to help her nor to touch him, but sending them away so that she might be alone with Khaled.

"I have slain certain of your enemies, Zehowah," he said, at last, "and I have driven out the rest from the city." As yet neither of them had spoken.

"Do you think that I have not heard what you have

done?" Zehowah asked. "You have saved us all from death and captivity. You are our father and our mother. And now I will bring you food and drink and afterwards you shall sleep."

"So you are well pleased with the doings of the husband you have married," he said.

He was displeased, for he had supposed that she would love him for his deeds and for his wounds and that she would speak differently. But though she tended him and bound his wounds, and bathed his brow with perfumed waters, and laid pillows under his head and fanned him, as a slave might have done, he saw that there was no warmth in her cheek, and that the depths of her eyes were empty, and that her hands were neither hot nor cold. By all these signs he knew that she felt no love for him, so he spoke coldly to her.

"Is it for me to be pleased or displeased with the deeds of my lord and master?" she asked. "Nevertheless, thousands are even now blessing your name and returning thanks to Allah for having sent them a preserver in the hour of danger. I am but one of them."

"I would rather see a faint light in your eyes, as of a star rising in the desert, than hear the blessings of all the men of Nejed. I would rather that your hand were cold when it touches mine, and your cheek hot when I kiss it, than that your father should bestow upon me all the treasures of Riad."

"Is that love?" asked Zehowah, with a laugh. "A cold hand, a hot cheek, a bright eye?"

Khaled was silent, for he saw that she understood his words but not his meaning. It was now noon and it was very hot, even in the inner shade of the harem, and Khaled was glad to rest after the hard fighting, for his many slight wounds smarted with the healing balsam, and his heart was heavy and discontented.

Then Zehowah called a slave woman to fan him with a palm leaf, and presently she brought him meat and rice and dates to eat, and cool drink in a golden cup, and she sat at his feet while he refreshed himself.

"How many did you slay with your own hand?" she asked at last, taking up the good sword which lay beside him on the carpet.

CHAPTER IV

KHALED pondered deeply, being uncertain what to do, and trying to find out some action which could win for him what he wanted. Zehowah received no answer to her question as to the number of enemies he had slain and she did not ask again, for she thought that he was weary and wished to rest in silence.

"What do you like best in the whole world?" he asked after a long time, to see what she would say.

"I like you best," she answered, smiling, while she still played with his sword.

"That is very strange," Khaled answered, musing. But the colour rose darkly in his cheeks above his beard, for he was pleased now as he had been displeased before.

"Why is it strange?" asked Zehowah. "Are you not the palm tree in my plain, and a tower of refuge for my people?"

"And will you dry up the well from which the tree draws life, and take away the corner-stone of the tower's foundation?"

"You speak in fables," said Zehowah, laughing.

"Yet you imagined the fable yourself, when you likened me to a palm and to a tower. But I am no lover of allegories. The sword is my argument, and my

wit is in my arm. The wall by the tree is the wall of love, and the chief foundation of the tower is the love of Zehowah. If you destroy that, the tree will wither and the tower will fall."

"Surely there was never such a man as you," Zehowah answered, half jesting but half in earnest. "You are as one who has bought a white mare; and though she is fleet, and good to look at, and obedient to his voice and knee, yet he is discontented because she cannot speak to him, and he would fain have her black instead of white, and if possible would teach her to sing like a Persian nightingale."

"Is it then not natural in a woman to love man? Have you heard no tales of love from the story tellers of the harem?"

"I have heard many such tales, but none of them were told of me," Zehowah replied. "Will you drink again? Is the drink too sweet, or is it not cool?"

She had risen from her seat and held the golden cup, bending down to him, so that her face was near his. He laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"Hear me, Zehowah," he said. "I want but one thing in the world, and it was for that I came out of the Red Desert to be your husband. And that thing I will have, though the price be greater than rubies, or than blood, or than life itself."

"If it is mine, I freely give it to you. If it is not mine, take it by force, or I will help you to take it by a stratagem, if I can. Am I not your wife?"

She spoke thus, supposing from his face that he meant

some treasure that could be taken by strength or by wile, for she could not believe a man could speak so seriously of a mere thought such as love.

"Neither my right hand nor your wit can give me this, but only your heart, Zehowah," he answered, still holding her and looking at her.

But now she did not laugh, for she saw that he was greatly in earnest.

"You are still talking of love," she said. "And you are not jesting. I do not know what to answer you. Gladly will I say, I love you. Is that all? What is it else? Are those the words?"

"I care little for the words. But I will have the reality, though it cost your life and mine."

"My life? Will you take my life, for the sake of a thought?"

"A thought!" he exclaimed. "Do you call love a thought? I had not believed a woman could be so cold as that."

"If not a thought, what then? I have spoken the truth. If it were a treasure, or anything that can be taken, you could take it, and I could help you. But if the possibility of possessing it lie not in deeds, it lies in thoughts, and is itself a thought. If you can teach me, I will think what you will; but if you cannot teach me, who shall? And how will it profit you to take my life or your own?"

"Is it possible that love is only a thought?" asked Khaled, speaking rather to himself than to her.

"It must be," she answered. "The body is what

it is in the eyes of others, but the soul is what it thinks itself to be, happy or unhappy, loving or not loving."

"You are too subtle for me, Zehowah," Khaled said. "Yet I know that this is not all true."

For he knew that he possessed no soul, and yet he loved her. Moreover he could think himself happy or unhappy.

"You are too subtle," he repeated. "I will take my sword again and I will go out and fight, and pursue the enemy and waste their country, for it is not so hard to cut through steel as to touch the heart of a woman who does not love, and it is easier to tear down towers and strongholds of stone with the naked hands than to build a temple upon the moving sand of an empty heart."

Khaled would have risen at once, but Zehowah took his hand and entreated him to stay with her.

"Will you go out in the heat of the day, wounded and wearied?" she asked. "Surely you will take a fever and die before you have followed the Shammars so far as two days' journey."

"My wounds are slight, and I am not weary," Khaled answered. "When the smith has heated the iron in the forge, does he wait until it is cold before striking?"

"But think also of the soldiers, who have striven hard, and cannot thus go out upon a great expedition without preparation as well as rest."

"I will take those whom I can find. And if they will go with me, it is well. But if not, I will go alone, and they and the rest will follow after."

"It is summer, too," said Zehowah, keeping him back. "Is this a time to go out into the northern desert? Both men and beasts will perish by the way."

"Has not Allah bound every man's fate about his neck? And can a man cast it from him?"

"I know not otherwise, but if heat and hunger and thirst do not kill the men, they will certainly destroy the beasts, whose names are not recorded by Asrael, and who have no destiny of their own."

"You hinder me," said Khaled. "And yet you do not know how many of the Shammar may be yet lurking within a day's march of the city, slaying your people, burning their houses and destroying their harvest. Let me go. Will you love me better if I stay?"

"You will be the better able to get the victory."

"Will you love me better if I stay?"

"If you go now, you may fail in your purpose and perish as well. How could I love you at all then?"

"It is the victory you love then — not me?"

"Could I love defeat? Nay, do not be angry with me. Stay here at least until the evening. Think of the burning sun and the raging thirst and the smarting of your wounds which have only been dressed this first time. Think of the soldiers, too ——"

"They can bear what I can bear. Was it not summer time when the Prophet went out against the Romans?"

"I do not know. Stay with me, Khaled."

"I will come back when I have destroyed the Shammars."

"And if the soldiers will not go with you, will you indeed go out alone?"

"Yes. I will go alone. When they see that they will follow me. They are not foxes. They are brave men."

Khaled rose and girt his sword about him. Zehowah helped him, seeing that she could not persuade him to stay.

"Farewell," he said, shortly, and without so much as touching her hand he turned and went out. She followed him to the door of the room and stood watching as he went away.

"One of us two was to rule," she said to herself, "and it is he, for I cannot move him. But what is this talk of love? Does he need love, who is himself the master?"

She sighed and went back to the carpet on which they had been sitting. Then she called in her women and bid them tell her all they had heard about the fight in the morning; and they, thinking to please her, extolled the deeds of Khaled and of the tens he had slain they made hundreds, and of the thousands of the enemy's army they made tens of thousands, till the walls of Riad could not have contained the hosts of which they spoke, and the dry sand of the desert could not have drunk all the blood which had been shed.

Meanwhile Khaled went into the outer court of the palace, where many soldiers were congregated together in the shade of the high wall, eating camel's meat and blanket bread and drinking the water from the well.

They were all able-bodied and unhurt, for those who had been wounded were at their houses, tended by their wives.

"Men of Riad!" cried Khaled, standing before them. "We have fought a good fight this morning and the power of our foes is broken. But all are not yet destroyed, and it may be that there are many thousands still lurking within a day's march of the city, slaying the people, burning their houses and destroying their harvests. Let us go out and kill them all before they are able to go back to their own country. Afterwards we will pursue those who are already escaping, and we will lay all the tribes of Shammar under tribute and bring back the women captive."

Thereupon a division arose among the soldiers. Some were for going at once with Khaled, but others said it was the hot season and no time for war.

"It is indeed summer," said Khaled. "But if the Shammars were able to come to Riad in the heat, the men of Riad are able to go to them. And I at least will go at once, and those who wish to share the spoil will go with me, but those who are satisfied to sit in the shade and eat camel's meat will stay behind. In an hour's time I will ride out of the northern gate."

So saying, Khaled rode slowly down into the city towards the market-place. The people were carrying away their own dead, and dragging off the bodies of their enemies, with camels, by fours and fives tied together to bury them in a great ditch without the walls. When Khaled appeared, many of the men gathered

round him, with cries of joy, for they had supposed that some of his wounds were dangerous and that they should not see him for many days.

"Wallah! He is with us again!" they shouted, jostling each other to get near, and standing on tip-toe to see the good mare that had carried him so well in the fight.

"Masallah! I am with you," answered Khaled, "and if you will go with me we will send many more of the Shammars to eat thorns and thistles, as many as dwell in Kasim and Tabal Shammar as far as Haïl; and by the help of Allah we will take the city of Haïl itself and divide the spoil and bring away the women captive; and when we have taken all that there is we will lay the land under tribute and make it subject to Nejed. So let those who will go with me arm themselves and take every man his horse or his camel, and dates and barley and water-skins, and in an hour's time we will ride out. For Allah will certainly give us the victory."

"Let us bury the dead to-day and to-morrow we will go," said many of those nearest to him.

"Are there no old men and boys in Riad to bind the sheaves you have mown?" asked Khaled. "And are there no women to mourn over the dead of your kindred who have fallen in a good fight? And as for to-morrow, it is yet in Allah's hand. But to-day we have already with us. However, if you will not go with me, I will go alone."

The men were pleased with Khaled's speech, and

indeed the greater part of the dead were buried by this time, for all the people had made haste to the work, fearing lest the bodies should bring a pestilence among them, since it was summer-time and very hot. Then all those who were unhurt and could bear arms, went and washed themselves, and took their weapons and food, as Khaled had directed them. Before the call to afternoon prayers the whole host went out of the northern gate.

Then Khaled accomplished all that he had spoken of, and much more, for he drove the scattered force of the enemy before him, overtaking all at last and slaying all whom he overtook as far as Zulfah, which is by the narrow end of the Nefud. Here he rested a short time, and then quickly crossing the sand, he entered the country called Kasim, which is subject to the Shammars. Here he was told by a woman who had been taken that the Shammars were coming with a new army against him out of Haïl. He therefore hid his host in a pass of the hills just above the plain, and sent down a few Bedouins to encamp at the foot of the mountains, bidding them call themselves Shammars and make a show of being friendly to the enemy. So when the army of the Shammars reached the foot of the hills, they saw the tents and only one or two camels, and Khaled's Bedouins came out and welcomed them, and told them that Khaled was still crossing the Nefud, and that if they made haste through the hills they might come upon him unawares and at an advantage as he began to ascend. Thereupon the enemy

rejoiced and entered the pass in haste, after filling their water-skins.

When they were in the midst of the hills, Khaled and his army sprang up from the ambush and fell upon them, and utterly destroyed them, taking all their horses and camels and arms; after which he went down into the plain and laid waste the country about Haïl. He took the city as the Shammars had taken Riad. For he himself got upon the wall at night, with the strongest and the bravest of his followers, and slew the guards and opened the gate just before the dawn. But there was no Khaled in Haïl to rally the soldiers and give them heart to turn and make a stand in the streets.

Khaled then entered the palace and took the Sultan of Shammar alive, not suffering him to be hurt, for he wished to bring him to Riad. This Sultan was a man of middle age, having only one eye, and also otherwise ill-favoured, besides being cowardly and fat. So Khaled ordered that he should be put into a litter, and the litter into a cage, and the cage slung between two camels. But he commanded that the women of the harem should be well treated and brought before him, that he might see them, intending to bring back the most beautiful of them as presents to his father-in-law.

"Surely," said the men who were with him, "you will keep the fairest for yourself."

But Khaled turned angrily upon them.

"Have I not lately married the most beautiful woman in the world?" he asked. "I tell you it is

for her sake that I have destroyed the Shammars. But the Sultan shall have the best of these women, and afterwards the rest of them will be divided amongst you by lot."

When the women heard that they were to be distributed among the men of Nejed they at first made a pretence of howling and beating their breasts, but they rejoiced secretly and soon began to laugh and talk among themselves, pointing out to each other the strongest and most richly dressed of Khaled's followers, as though choosing husbands among them. But one of them neither wept nor spoke to her companions, but stood silently watching Khaled, and when he sat down upon a carpet in the chief kahwah of the house, she brought him drink in a goblet set with pearls from Katar, and sat down at his feet as though she had been his wife. But he took little heed of her at first, for he was busy with grave matters.

The other women, seeing what she did, thought that she was acting wisely in the hope of gaining Khaled's favour, seeing that he was the chief of their enemies, so they, too, came near, and brought water for his hands, and perfumes, and sweetmeats, thinking to outdo her. But she pushed them away, taking what they brought for him, and offering it herself.

"Are you better than we?" the women said angrily. "Has our lord chosen you for himself, that you will not let us come near him?"

Then Khaled noticed her and began to wonder at her attention and zeal.

"What is your name?" he asked. But she did not speak. "Who is she?" he inquired of the other women.

"She is an unbeliever," they answered contemptuously. "And she is proud, for she trusts in her white skin and her blue eyes, and her hair which is red without henna. She thinks she is better than we. Command us to uncover our faces, that you may see and judge between us."

"Let it be so. Let us see who is the fairest," said Khaled, and he laughed.

Then the woman who sat at his feet threw aside her veil, and all the others did the same. Khaled saw that the one was certainly more beautiful than the rest, for her skin was as white as milk, and her eyes like the sea of Oman when it is blue in winter. She had also long hair, plaited in three tresses which came down to her feet, red as the locusts when the sun shines upon them at evening, and not dyed.

"There is a bay mare in a stable of black ones," Khaled said. "What is the name of the bay mare?"

"Her name is Aziz, and she is a Christian," said one of the women.

"Not Aziz — Almasta," said the beautiful woman in an accent which showed that she could not speak Arabic fluently. "Almasta, a Christian."

"She was lately sent as a present to our master by the Emir of Basrah," said one of the others.

"He paid a thousand and five hundred sequins for her, for she was brought from Georgia," said another.

"But I am a free woman, and myself the daughter of an emir."

Then all the others began to scream.

"It is a lie," they cried. "Your father was a white slave from Syria."

"You are fools," retorted the woman who had spoken. "You should have said that you were also free women and the daughters of emirs. So our lord would have treated you with more consideration."

The others saw their folly and were silent and drew back, but Khaled only smiled.

"As good mares are bred in the stable as in the desert," he said, and the women laughed with him at the jest, for they saw that it pleased him.

But Almasta was silent and sat at his feet, looking into his face.

"You must learn to talk in Arabic," he said, "and then you will be able to tell stories of your native country to the Sultan, for he loves tales of travel."

Almasta smiled and bent her head a little, but she did not understand all he said, being but lately come into Arabia.

"I will go with you," she answered.

"Yes. You will go with me to Riad to the Sultan, and perhaps he will make you his wife, for he has none at present."

"I will go with you," she repeated, looking at him.

"She does not understand you," said the women, laughing at her ignorance of their own tongue.

"It is no matter," said Khaled. "She will learn in

due time. Perhaps it has pleased Allah to send my lord the Sultan a wife without a tongue for a blessing in his old age."

"I will go with you," Almasta said again.

"She can say nothing else," jeered the women.

One of them pulled her by her upper garment, so that she looked round.

"Can you say this, 'My father was a dog and the son of dogs'?" asked the woman.

But Almasta pushed her angrily away, for she half understood. Then the woman grew angry too, and shook her fist in Almasta's face.

"If you fight, you shall eat sticks," said Khaled, and then they were all quiet.

Thus he took possession of the city of Haïl, and remaining there some time he reduced all the country to submission, so that it remained a part of the kingdom of Nejed for many years after that. For the power of the Shammars was broken, and they could nowhere have mustered a thousand men able to bear arms. Khaled set a governor in the place of the Sultan, and ordered all the laws of the country in the same manner as those of Nejed, and after he had been absent from Riad nearly two months, he set aside a part of his force to remain behind and keep the peace in case there should be an outbreak, and with the rest he began to journey homeward, taking a great spoil and many captives with him.

During the march most of the women captives rode on camels, but a few of the most beautiful were taken

in litters lest the fatigues of riding should injure their appearance and thus diminish their value. Almasta was one of these, and the Sultan of Haïl was taken in a cage, as has been said, though he was not otherwise ill-treated, and received his portion of camel's meat and bread equal to that of the soldiers.

Khaled sent messengers on fleet mares to Riad to give warning of his coming, but he could not himself proceed very quickly, because his army was burdened with so much spoil; and as there was now no haste to overtake an enemy he journeyed chiefly at night, resting during the day wherever there was water, for although the summer was far advanced it was still hot. He thought continually of Zehowah, by day in his tent and by night on the march, for he supposed that she would be glad when she heard of the victory and that she would now love him, because he had avenged her people, and taken Haïl, and brought back gold and captives, besides other treasures.

"She was already pleased with my deeds, before we left Riad," he thought, "for she asked me how many of the Shammars I had slain with my own hand, and at the last she wished me to stay with her, most probably that I might tell her more about the fight. How much the more will she be glad now, since I have killed so many more and have brought back treasure, and made a whole country subject to her father. Shall not blood and gold buy the love of a woman?"

It chanced once during this journey that Khaled was sitting at the door of his tent after the sun had

gone down and before the night march had begun. Upon the one side, at a little distance, was the tent of the women captives who had been taken from the palace in Haïl, and upon the other the soldiers had set down the cage in which the Sultan of Shammar was carried. The men had laid a carpet over the cage to keep the sun from the prisoner during the heat of the day, lest he should not reach Riad alive as Khaled desired. For the Sultan was fat and of a choleric temper. Now the soldiers had given him food but had forgotten to bring him water, and it was hot under the carpet now that the evening had come. But he could lift it up a little on one side, and having done so, he began to cry out, cursing Khaled and railing at him, not knowing that he was so near at hand.

"Oh, you whose portion it shall be to broil everlastingly, and to eat thistles and thorns, and to lie bound in red-hot chains as I lie in this cage! Have you brought me out into the desert to die of thirst like a lame camel? Surely your entertainment on the day of judgment shall be boiling water and the fruit of Al Zakkam, and whenever you try to get out of hell you shall be dragged back again and beaten with iron clubs, and your skin shall dissolve, and the boiling water shall be poured upon your head!"

In this way the captive cried out, for he was very thirsty. But when Khaled saw that no one gave him water he called in the darkness to the women who sat by their tent.

"Fetch water and give the man to drink," he said.

One of the women rose quickly and filled a jar at the well close by, and took it to the cage. But then the railing and cursing broke out afresh, so that Khaled wondered what had happened.

"Who has sent me this unbelieving woman to torture me with thirst?" cried the prisoner. "Are you not Aziz whom I was about to take for my fourth wife on account of your red hair? But your hair shall be a perpetual flame hereafter, burning the bones of your head, and your flesh shall be white with heat as iron in a forge. If I were still in my kingdom you should eat many sticks! If Allah delivers me from my enemies I will cause your skin to be embroidered with gold for a trapping to my horse!"

The moon rose at this time, being a little past the full, and Khaled looked towards the cage and saw that the woman was standing two paces away from the Sultan's outstretched hand. She dabbled in the cool water with her fingers so that a plashing sound was heard, and then drank herself, and scattered afterwards a few drops in the face of the thirsty captive.

"It is good water," she said. "It is cold."

Khaled knew from her broken speech that it was Almasta, and he understood that she was torturing the prisoner with the sound and sight of the water, and with her words. So he rose from his place and went to the cage.

"Did I not tell you to give him drink?" he asked, standing before the woman.

"Oh, my lord, be merciful," cried the captive, when

he saw that Khaled himself was there. "Be merciful and let me drink, for your heart is easily moved to pity, and by an act of charity you shall hereafter sit in the shade of the tree Sedrat and drink for ever of the wine of paradise."

"I do not desire wine," said Khaled. "But you shall certainly not thirst. Give him the jar," he said to Almasta. But she shook her head.

"He is bad and ugly," she said. "If he does not drink, he will die."

Then Khaled put out his hand to take the jar of water, but Almasta threw it violently to the ground, and it broke to pieces. Thereupon the captive began again to rail and curse at Almasta and to implore Khaled with many blessings.

"You shall drink, for I will bring water myself," said Khaled. He went back to his tent and took his own jar to the well, and filled it carefully.

When he turned he saw that Almasta was running from his tent towards the cage, with a drawn sword in her hand. He then ran also, and being very swift of foot, he overtook her just as she thrust at the Sultan through the bars. But the sword caught in the folds of the soft carpet, and Khaled took it from her hand, and thrust her down so that she fell upon her knees. Then he gave the prisoner the jar with the water that remained in it, for some had been spilt as he ran.

"Who has given you the right to kill my captives?" he asked of Almasta.

"Kill me, then!" she cried.

"Indeed, if you were not so valuable, I would cut off your head," Khaled answered. "Why do you wish me to kill you?"

"I hate him," she said, pointing to the captive, who was drinking like a thirsty camel.

"That is no reason why I should kill you. Go back to the tents."

But Almasta laid her hand on the sword he held and tried to bring it to her own throat.

"This is a strange woman," said Khaled. "Why do you wish to die? You shall go to Riad and be the Sultan's wife."

"No, no!" she cried. "Kill me! Not him, not him!"

"Of whom do you speak?"

"Him!" she answered, again pointing to the prisoner. "Is he not the Sultan?"

Khaled laughed aloud, for he saw that she had supposed she was to be taken to Riad to be made the wife of the Sultan of Shammar. Indeed, the other women had told her so, to anger her.

"Not this man," he said, endeavouring to make her understand. "There is another Sultan at Riad. The Sultan of Shammar is one, the Sultan of Nejed another."

"You?" she asked, suddenly springing up. "With you?"

The moon was bright and Khaled saw that her eyes gleamed like stars and her face grew warm, and when she took his hands her own were cold.

"No, not I," he answered. "I am not the Sultan."

But her face became grey in the moonlight, and she covered her head with her veil and went slowly back to her tent.

"This woman loves me," Khaled thought. "And as I have not talked much with her, it must be because I am strong and have conquered the people among whom she was captive. How much the more then, will Zehowah love me, for the same reason."

So he was light of heart, and soon afterwards he commanded everything to be made ready and mounted his bay mare for the night march.

CHAPTER V

When Khaled was within half a day's march of Riad, the Sultan came out to meet him with a great train of attendants and courtiers, with cooks bringing food and sweetmeats, and a number of musicians. And they all encamped together for a short time in the shade of the trees, for there were gardens in the place. The Sultan embraced Khaled and put upon him a very magnificent garment, after which they sat down together in a large tent which the Sultan had brought with him. When they had eaten and refreshed themselves they began to talk, and Khaled told his father-in-law all that he had done, and gave him an account of the spoils which he had brought back, commanding the most valuable objects to be brought into the tent. After this the Sultan desired to see the women captives.

"There is one especially whom it may please you to take for yourself," said Khaled, and he ordered Almasta to be brought in.

When the male slaves had left the tent, Almasta drew aside her veil. The Sultan looked at her and smiled, stroking his beard, for he was much pleased.

"Her face is like a pearl and her hair is a setting of red gold," he said. "Truly she is like the sunrise

on a fair morning when there are red clouds in the east."

Almasta looked attentively at him, and afterwards she glanced at Khaled, who could not avoid looking at her on account of her beauty. Her face was grave and indifferent. Then Khaled told the Sultan how she had hated the Sultan of Shammar and had tried to kill him on the journey.

"This is a dangerous woman, my son," said the old man. But he laughed as he said it, for although he was old, he was no coward. "She is dangerous, indeed. Will you love me, pearl of my soul's treasures?" he inquired of her, still smiling.

"You are my lord and my master," she answered, looking down.

When Khaled heard this he wondered whether his father-in-law would get any affection from her. Zehowah had answered in the same words.

"By Allah, I will give you such gifts as will make you love me," said the Sultan. "What shall I give you?"

"His head," answered Almasta, raising her eyes quickly.

"The head of the Sultan of Shammar?"

Almasta nodded, and Khaled could see that her lips trembled.

"A dead man has no companions," said the Sultan, looking at Khaled to see what he would do. But Khaled cared little, and said nothing.

So the Sultan called a slave and ordered the captive's

head to be struck off immediately. Then Almasta threw herself upon the carpet on the floor of the tent and embraced his feet.

"See how easily the love of a woman is got," Khaled thought, "even by an old man whose beard is grey and his limbs heavy."

When Almasta rose again, she looked at Khaled triumphantly, as though to remind him of the night on the journey when he had hindered her from killing the captive in his cage. But though he understood her, he held his peace, for he had cared nothing whether the prisoner lived or died after he had delivered him over to his father-in-law, and he was considering whether he might not please Zehowah in some similar manner. This was not easy, however, for he was not aware that Zehowah had any private enemy, whose head he might offer her.

After the Sultan had seen the other women and the best of the spoils, Khaled begged that he might be allowed to ride on into Riad alone, for he saw that the Sultan intended to spend the night in feasting where he had encamped. The Sultan was so much pleased with Almasta and so greatly diverted in examining the rich stuffs and the gold and silver vessels and jewels, that he let Khaled go, almost without trying to detain him, though he made him many speeches praising his conduct of the war, and would have loaded him with gifts. But Khaled would take nothing with him, saying that he would only receive his just share with the rest; and the fame of his generosity immediately went

abroad among the soldiers and the Bedouins throughout all the camp.

"For," said Khaled, "there is not a fleeter mare than mine among all those we have taken; my sword proves to be a good one, for I have tried it well; as for women, I am satisfied with one wife; and besides a wife, a sword and a horse, there are no treasures in the world which I covet."

So Khaled rode away alone into Riad, for he desired no company, being busy with his own thoughts. He reached the gates at nightfall and went immediately to the palace and entered Zehowah's apartments. He found her sitting among her women in her accustomed place, listening to the tales of an old woman who sat in the midst of the circle. As soon as Zehowah saw her husband she sprang up gladly to meet him, as a friend would have done.

"Though it is summer-time, I have pursued the enemy," said Khaled. "And though the sun was hot, I have got the victory and brought home the spoil."

He said this remembering how she had tried to hinder him from going. Then he gave her his sword and he sat down with her, while the women brought food and drink, for he was weary, and hungry and thirsty. The women also brought their musical instruments and began to sing songs in praise of Khaled's deeds; but after a time he sent them all away and remained alone with Zehowah.

"O Zehowah," he said, "you are my law and my rule. You are my speech and my occupation. You

are my Kebla to which I turn in prayer. For the love of you I have got the victory over many foes. And yet I see that your cheek is cold and the light of your eyes is undisturbed. Have you no other enemies for me to destroy, or have you no secret foe whose head would be a pleasant gift?"

Zehowah laughed, as she fanned him with a palm leaf.

"Do you still thirst for war, Khaled?" she asked. "Truly you have swallowed up all our enemies as the dry sand swallows up water. Where shall I find enemies enough for you to slay? You went out in pride and you have returned in glory. Are you not yet satisfied? And as for any secret foe, if I have any I do not know him. Rest, therefore; eat and drink and spend your days in peace."

"I care little for either food or drink," Khaled answered, "and I need little rest."

"Will nothing but war please you? Must you overcome Egypt and make Syria pay tribute as far as Damascus before you will rest?"

"I will conquer the whole world for you, if you wish it," said Khaled.

"What should I do with the world?" asked Zehowah. "Have I not treasures and garments enough and to spare, besides the spoil you have now brought home? And besides, if you would conquer the world you must needs make war upon true believers, amongst whom we do not count the people of Shammar. Be satisfied, therefore, and rest in peace."

"How shall I be satisfied until I have kindled the

light in Zehowah's eyes at my coming, and until I feel that her hand is cold and trembles when I take it in mine?"

"Do I say to my eyes, 'be dull'—or to my hand, 'do not tremble'?" Zehowah asked. "Is this, which you ask of me, something I can command at will, as I can a smile or a word? If it is, teach me and I will learn. But if not, why do you expect of me what I cannot do? Can a camel gallop like a horse, or a horse trot like a camel, or bear great burdens through the desert? Have you come back from a great war only to talk of this something which you call love, which is yours and not mine, which you feel and I cannot feel, which you cannot explain nor describe, and which, after all, is but a whim of the fancy, as one man loves sour drink and another sweet?"

"Do you think that love is nothing but a whim of the fancy?" asked Khaled, bitterly.

"What else can it be? Would you love me if you were blind?"

"Yes."

"And if you were deaf?"

"Yes."

"And if you could not touch my face with your hands, nor kiss me with your lips?"

"Yes."

Zehowah laughed.

"Then love is indeed a fancy. For if you could not see me, nor touch me, nor hear me, what would remain to you but an empty thought!"

"Have I seen you, or touched you, or heard your voice for these two months and a half?" asked Khaled. "Yet I have loved you as much during all that time."

"You mean that you have thought of me, as I have thought of you, by the memory of what was not fancy, but reality. Would you dispute with me, Khaled? You will find me subtle."

"There is more wit in my arm than in my head," Khaled answered, "and it is not easy for a man to persuade a woman."

"It is very easy, provided that the man have reason on his side. But where are the treasures you have brought back, the slaves and the rich spoils? I would gladly see some of them, for the messengers you sent told great tales of the riches of Haïl."

"To-morrow they will be brought into the city. Your father has remained feasting in the gardens towards Dereyiyah, and the whole army with him. I rode hither alone."

"Why did you not remain too?"

"Because that whim of the fancy which I call love brought me back," Khaled answered.

"Then I am glad you love me," said Zehowah. "For I am glad you came quickly."

"Are you truly glad?"

"I was very tired of my women," she answered. "I am sorry you have brought nothing with you. Are there any among the captives who are beautiful?"

"There is one, a present sent lately to the Sultan

of Shammar. She is very beautiful, and unlike all the rest. Your father is much pleased with her, and will perhaps marry her."

"Of what kind is her beauty?"

"She is as white as milk, her eyes are twin sapphires, her mouth is a rose, her hair is like gold reddened in fire."

Zehowah was silent for a while, and twisted a string of musk-beads round her fingers.

"The others are all Arabian women," Khaled said at last.

"Why did you not keep the beautiful one for yourself?" asked Zehowah, suddenly throwing aside her beads and looking at him curiously. "Surely you, who have borne the brunt of the war, might have chosen for yourself what pleased you best."

Khaled looked at her in great astonishment.

"Have I not married Zehowah? Would you have me take another wife?"

"Why not? Is it not lawful for a man to take four wives at one time? And this woman might have loved you, as you desire to be loved."

"Would it be nothing to you, if I took her?"

"Nothing. I am the King's daughter. I shall always be first in the house. I say, she might love you. Then you would be satisfied."

"Zehowah, Zehowah!" cried Khaled. "Is love a piece of gold, that it matters not whence it be, so long as a man has it in his own possession? Or is it wood of the 'Ood tree that one may buy it and bring it home

and make the whole house fragrant with it? Is a man's heart like his belly, which is alike satisfied with different kinds of food?"

"He who eats, knows by the taste whether he eats Persian mutton, or barley bread, or only broiled locusts. But a man who believes that he is loved, knows that he is loved, so far as knowing is possible, and must be satisfied, if to be loved is what he desires."

"That may be true. But he who desires bread is not satisfied with locusts. It is your love which I would have. Not the love of another."

"You are like a man who hopes to get by argument a sum of money from one who has nothing," said Zehowah, smiling at him. "Can you make gold grow in the purse of a beggar? Or can you cause a ghada bush to bear dates by reasoning with it? Your heart is a palm tree, but mine is a ghada bush."

"Yet an angel may touch the ghada and it will bear fruit," answered Khaled, for he remembered how the angel had turned dry leaves into rich garments for him to wear.

"Doubtless Allah can do all things. But where is the angel? Hear me, Khaled, for I speak very reasonably, as a wife should speak to her husband, who is her lord and master. My lord is not satisfied with me and desires something of me which is not mine to give. Let him take another wife beside me. I have given my lord a kingdom and great riches and power. Let him take another wife now, who will give him this fancy of his thoughts for which he yearns, though she

have no other possessions. In this way my lord will be satisfied."

Khaled listened sadly to what Zehowah said, and he began to despair, for he was not subtle in argument nor eloquent in speech. The reason of this was plain. In the days when he had been one of the genii he had wandered over the whole earth and had heard the eloquence of all nations and the arguments of all philosophers, learning therefrom that deeds are no part of words, and that they who would be believed must speak little and do much. But the genii possess no insight into the hearts of women.

Khaled reflected also that the length of life granted him was uncertain, and that he had already spent two months and a half at a distance from Zehowah in accomplishing the conquest whereby he had hoped to win her love. But since this had utterly failed, he cast about in his mind for some new deed to do, which could be done without leaving her even for a short time. But he was troubled by her indifference, and most of all by her proposing that he should take another wife. As he thought of this, he was filled with horror, and he understood that he loved Zehowah more than he had supposed, since he could not bear to think of setting another woman beside her.

Then his face became very dark and his eyes were like camp fires far off in the desert, and he took Zehowah's wrist in his hand, holding it tightly as though he would not let it go. As his heart grew hot in his breast, words came to his lips unawares like

the speech of a man in a dream, and he heard his own voice as it were from a distance.

"I will not take another," he said. "What is the love of any other woman to me? It is as dust in the throat of a man thirsting for water. Show me a woman who loves me. Her face shall be but a cold mirror in which the image of a fire is reflected without warmth, her soft words shall be to me as the screaming of a parrot, her touch a thorn and her lips ashes. What is it to me if all the women of the world love me? Kindle a fire and burn them before me, for I care not. Let them perish all together, for I shall not know that they are gone. I love you and not another. Shall it profit a man to fill his mouth with dust, though it be the dust of gold mingled with precious stones, when he desires water? Or shall he be warmed in winter by the reflection of a fire in a mirror? By Allah! I want neither the wealth of Haïl, nor a wife with red hair. Let them take gold who do not ask for love. I want but one thing, and Zehowah alone can give it to me. Wallah! My heart burns. But I would give it to be burned for ever in hell if I might get your love now. This I ask. This only I desire. For this I will suffer and for this I am ready to die before my time."

Zehowah was silent, looking at him with wonder, and yet not altogether pleased. She saw that she could not understand him, though she did as well as she could.

"Has he not all that the heart of man can desire?" she thought. "Am I not young and beautiful, and possessed of many jewels and treasures? Have I not given

him wealth and power, and has he not with his own hand got the victory over his enemies and mine? And yet he is not satisfied. Surely, he is too hard to please."

But he, reading her thoughts from her face, continued in his speech.

"What is all the happiness in the world without love?" he asked. "It is like a banquet in which many rich viands are served, but the guests cannot eat them because there is no salt in any of them. And what is a beautiful woman without love? She is like a garden in which there are all kinds of rare flowers, and much grass, and deep shade, but in which a man cannot live, because nothing grows there which he can eat when he is hungry."

"Truly," said Zehowah, "that is what you will make of your life. For there is a garden called Irem, planted in a secret place of the deserts about Aden, by Sheddad the son of Ad, who desired to outdo the gardens of paradise, and was destroyed for his impiety with all his people, by the hand of Allah. But a certain man named Abdullah ibn Kelabah was searching in the desert for a lost camel, and came unawares upon this place. There were fruits and water there and all that a man could wish for, and Abdullah dwelt in peace and plenty, praising Allah. Then on a certain day he desired to eat an onion, and finding none anywhere, he went out, intending to obtain one, and having eaten it, to return immediately. But though he searched the desert many months he was never able to find the garden again. Wherefore it is said that Abdullah ibn

Kelabah lost the earthly paradise of Irem for a mouthful of onion."

"How can you understand me if you do not love me?" asked Khaled. "Love has its own language, and when two love they understand each the other's words. But when the one loves and the other loves not, they are strangers, though they be man and wife; or they are like Persians and Arabians not understanding either the other's speech, or that if the wife cries 'father,' her husband will bring her a cup of water, supposing her to be thirsty. For those who would speak one language must be of one heart, and they who would be of one heart must love each other."

Then Zehowah sighed and leaned against the cushions by the wall and drew her hand away from Khaled.

"What is it?" she asked in a low voice. "What is it you would have?" But though she had already asked the question many times she found no answer, and none that he was able to give could enlighten her darkness.

"It is the spark that kindles the flame," Khaled said, and he pointed to the lights that hung in the room. "Your beauty is like that of a cunningly designed lamp, inlaid with gold and silver and covered with rich ornament, which is seen by day. But there is no light within, and it is cold, though it be full of oil and the wick be ready."

Zehowah turned towards him somewhat impatiently.

"And you are as one who would kindle the flame with words, having no torch," she answered.

"Have I not done deeds also?" asked Khaled. "Or have I spoken much, that you should reproach me? Surely I have slain more of your enemies than I have spoken words to you to-night."

"But have I asked for an offering of blood, or a marriage dower of dead bodies?"

Khaled was silent, for he was bitterly disappointed, and as his eyes fell upon the sword which hung on the wall, he felt that he could almost have taken it and made an end of Zehowah for very anger that she would not love him. Had he not gone out for her into the raging heat of summer, and borne the burden of a great war, and destroyed a nation and taken a city? Moreover, if neither words nor deeds could gain her love, what means remained to him to try?

All through the night Khaled pondered, calling up all that he had seen in the world in former times, until he fell asleep at last, wearied in heart.

Very early in the morning one of Zehowah's women came and stood by his bed and waked him. He could see that her face was pale in the dawn, her limbs trembled and her voice was uncertain.

"Arise, my lord!" she said. "A messenger has come from the army with evil news, and stands waiting in the court."

Khaled sprang up, and Zehowah awoke also.

"What is this message?" he asked hastily.

But the woman threw herself upon the floor and covered her face, as though begging forgiveness because she brought evil tidings.

"Speak!" said Zehowah. "What is it?"

"Our lord the Sultan is dead!" cried the woman, and she broke out into weeping and crying and would say nothing more.

But when Zehowah heard that her father was dead, she sat down upon the floor and beat her breast and tore her hair, and wailed and wept, while all the women of the harem came and gathered round her and joined in her mourning, so that the whole palace was filled with the noise of their lamentations.

Khaled went out into the court and questioned the messenger, who told him that the Sultan had held a great feast in the evening in the gardens of Dereyiyah, having with him the woman Almasta and the other captive women, and being served by black slaves. But, suddenly, in the night, when most of the soldiers were already asleep, there had been a great cry, and the slaves and women had come running from the tent, crying that the Sultan was dead. This was true, and the Jewish physician who had gone out with his master declared that he had died from an access of humours to the head, brought on by a surfeit of sweetmeats, there being at the time an evil conjunction of Zoharah and Al Marech in square aspect to the moon and in the house of death.

Khaled therefore mounted his bay mare and rode quickly out to Dereyiyah, where he found that the news was true, and the women were already preparing the Sultan's body for burial. Having ordered the mourning, and commanded the army to prepare for

the return to the city, Khaled set out with the funeral procession ; and when he reached the walls of Riad he turned to the left and passed round to the north-east side of the city where the burial-ground is situated. Here he laid the body of his father-in-law in the tomb which the latter had prepared for himself during his lifetime, and afterwards, dismissing the mourners, he went back into the city to the palace.

After the days of mourning were accomplished, the will of the Sultan was made known, though indeed the people were well acquainted with it already. By his will Khaled succeeded to the sovereignty of the kingdom of Nejed and to all the riches and treasures which the Sultan had accumulated during his lifetime. But the people received the announcement with acclamations and much joy, followed by a great feasting, for which innumerable camels were slain. Khaled also called all the chief officers and courtiers to a banquet and addressed them in a few words, according to his manner.

"Men of Nejed," he said, "it has pleased Allah to remove to the companionship of the faithful our master the Sultan, my revered father-in-law, upon whom be peace, and to set me up among you as King in his stead, being the husband of his only daughter, which you all know. As for the past, you know me ; but if I have wronged any man let him declare it and I will make reparation. And if not, let none complain hereafter. But as for the future I will be a just ruler so long as I live, and will lead the men of Nejed to war,

when there is war, and will divide the spoil fairly; and in peace I will not oppress the people with taxes nor change the just and good laws of the kingdom. And now the feast is prepared. Sit down cheerfully, and may Allah give us both the appetite to enjoy and the strength to digest all the good things which shall be set before us."

But Khaled himself ate sparingly, for his heart was heavy, and when they had feasted and drunk treng juice and heard music, he retired to the harem, where he found Zehowah sitting with Almasta, the Georgian woman, there being no other women present in the room. He was surprised when he saw Almasta, though he knew that the captive women had been lodged in the palace, the distribution of the spoil from the war having been put off by the mourning for the Sultan.

When Almasta heard him enter, she looked up quickly and a bright colour rose in her face, as when the juice of a pomegranate is poured into milk, and disappeared again as the false dawn before morning, leaving no trace. Khaled sat down.

"Is not this the woman of whom you spoke?" Zehowah asked. "I knew her from the rest by her red hair."

"This is the woman. Your father would have taken her for his wife. But Allah has disposed otherwise."

"She is beautiful. She is worthy to be a king's wife," said Zehowah.

"The Sultan?" asked Almasta, for she hardly understood. Her face turned as white as bone bleached by the sun, and her fingers trembled, while her eyes were cast down.

Zehowah looked at Khaled and laughed.

"See how she trembles and turns pale before you," she said. "And a little while ago her face was red. You have found a torch wherewith to kindle this lamp, and a breath that can extinguish it."

"I do not know," Khaled answered. But he looked attentively at Almasta and remained silent for some time. "It is now necessary to divide the spoils of the war," he said at last, "and to bestow such of these women as you do not wish to keep upon the most deserving of the officers."

"My lord will surely take the fairest for himself, since she loves him," said Zehowah, again laughing, but somewhat bitterly.

"May my tongue be cloven and my eyes be put out, may my hands wither at the wrists and my feet fall from my ankles, if I ever take any wife but you," said Khaled. "Yallah! So be it."

When Zehowah heard him say this, even while Almasta's face was unveiled before him, she understood that he was greatly in earnest.

"Let me keep her for my handmaid," she said at last.

"Is she mine that you need ask me? But it will be wiser to give her to Abdul Kerim, the sheikh of the horsemen. I have promised that the spoils should be

fairly divided, and though few have seen this woman many have heard of her beauty. And besides, she would weary you, for she cannot talk in Arabian, nor does she seem quick to learn. Abdul Kerim has the first right, since Allah has removed your father, upon whom be peace."

"Your words are my laws," answered Zehowah, obediently. "And, indeed, it may be that you are right, for I believe she can neither dance nor sing, nor play upon any musical instrument. She would certainly weary me after a time, as you say. Give her therefore to Abdul Kerim for his share."

They then made Almasta understand that she was to be given to the sheikh of the horsemen; but when she had understood she shook her head and smiled, though at first she said nothing, so that Khaled and Zehowah wondered whether she had comprehended what they had told her.

"Do you understand what we have told you?" asked Zehowah, who was diverted by her ignorance of the Arabic language.

"I understand."

"And are you not pleased that you are to be the wife of Abdul Kerim, who is a rich man and still young?"

"I was to be the Sultan's wife," said Almasta, with difficulty, looking at Khaled. "You told me so."

"The Sultan is dead," Khaled answered.

"Who is the Sultan now?" she asked.

"Khaled is the Sultan," said Zehowah.

"You said that I should be the Sultan's wife," Almasta repeated.

"Doubtless I said so," Khaled replied. "But Allah has ordered it otherwise."

Almasta again smiled and shook her head.

CHAPTER VI

On the following day Khaled made a division of the spoils, and gave Almasta to Abdul Kerim, enjoining upon him to marry her, since he had but two wives and could do so lawfully. The sheikh of the horsemen was glad, for he had heard much of Almasta's beauty, and he loved fair women, being of a fierce temper and not more than forty years old. So he called his friends to the marriage feast that same day, and Zehowah sent Almasta in a litter to his harem, giving her also numerous rich garments by way of a dower, but which in fact were due to Abdul Kerim as his share of the booty. So the men feasted, with music, until the evening, when the bridegroom retired to the harem and the Kadi came and read the contract; after which Abdul Kerim sat down while Almasta was brought before him in various dresses, one after the other, as is customary.

When the women were all gone away, Abdul Kerim began to talk to his wife, but she only laughed and said the few words she knew, not knowing what he said, and presently she began to sing to him in a low voice, in her own language. Her voice was very clear and quite different from that of the Arabian women whom Abdul had heard, and the tones vibrated with

great passion and sweetness, so that he was enchanted and listened, as in a dream, while his head rested against Almasta's knee. She continued to sing in such a manner that his soul was transported with delight; and at last, as the sound soothed him, he fell into a gentle sleep.

Almasta, still singing softly, loosened his vest, touching him so gently that he did not wake. She then drew out of one of the three tresses of her hair a fine steel needle, extremely long and sharp, having at one end a small wooden ball for a handle, and while she sang, she thrust it very quickly into his breast to its full length, so that it pierced his heart and he died instantly. But she continued to sing, lest any of the women should be listening from a distance. Presently she withdrew the needle so slowly that not a drop of blood followed it, and having made it pass thrice through the carpet she restored it to her hair, after which she fastened the dead man's vest again, so that nothing was disarranged. She sang on after this for some time, and then after a short silence she sprang up from the couch, uttering loud screams and lamentations and beating her breast violently.

The women of the harem came in quickly, and when they saw that their master was dead, they sat down with Almasta and wept with her, for as he lay dead there was no mark of any violence nor any sign whereby it could be told that he had not died naturally.

When Khaled heard that Abdul Kerim was dead, he was much grieved at heart, for the man had been

brave and had been often at his right hand in battle. But the news being brought to him at dawn when he awoke, he immediately sent the Jewish physician of the court to ascertain if possible the cause of the sudden death. The physician made careful examination of the body, and having purified himself returned to Khaled to give an account.

"I have executed my lord's orders with scrupulous exactness," he said, "and I find that without doubt the sheikh of the horsemen died suddenly by an access of humours to the heart, the sun being at that time in the Nadir, for he died about midnight, and being moreover in evil conjunction with the Dragon's Tail in the Heart of the Lion, and not yet far from the square aspect of Al Marech which caused the death of his majesty the late Sultan, upon whom be peace."

But Khaled was thoughtful, for he reflected that this was the second time that a man had died suddenly when he was about to be Almasta's husband, and he remembered, how she had attempted to kill the Sultan of Haïl, and had ultimately brought about his death.

"Have you examined the dead man as minutely as you have observed the stars?" he inquired. "Is there no mark of violence upon him, nor of poison, nor of strangling?"

"There is no mark. By Allah! I speak truth. My lord may see for himself, for the man is not yet buried."

"Am I a jackal, that I should sniff at dead bodies?" asked Khaled. "Go in peace."

The physician withdrew, for he saw that Khaled was displeased, and he was himself as much surprised as any one by the death of Abdul Kerim, a man lean and strong, not given to surfeiting and in the prime of health.

"Min Allah!" he said as he departed. "We are in the hand of the Lord, who knoweth our rising up and our lying down. It is possible that if I had seen this man at the moment of death, or a little before, I might have discovered the nature of his disease, for I could have talked with him and questioned him."

But Khaled went in and talked with Zehowah. She was greatly astonished when she heard that Almasta's husband was dead, but she was satisfied with the answer of the Jewish physician, who enjoyed great reputation and was believed to be at that time the wisest man in Arabia.

"Give her back to me, to be one of my women," said she. "It is not written that she should marry a man of Nejed, unless you will take her yourself."

But Khaled bent his brow angrily and his eyes glowed like the coals of a camp fire which is almost extinguished, when the night wind blows suddenly over the ashes.

"I have spoken," he said.

"And I have heard," she answered. "Let there be an end. But give me this woman to divert me with her broken speech."

"I fear she will do you an injury of which you may not live," said Khaled.

"What injury can she do me?" asked Zehowah in astonishment, not understanding him.

"She asked of your father the head of the Sultan of Haïl, whom she hated. And your father gave it to her."

"Peace be upon him!" exclaimed Zehowah, piously.

"Upon him peace. And when he would have married her, he died suddenly at the feasting. And now this Abdul Kerim, who was to have been her husband, is dead also, without sign, in the night, as a man stung by a serpent in his sleep. These are strange doings."

"If you think she has done evil, let her be put to death," said Zehowah. "But the physician found no mark upon Abdul Kerim. By the hand of Allah he was taken."

"Doubtless his fate was about his neck. But it is strange."

Zehowah looked at Khaled in silence, but presently she smiled and laid her hand upon his.

"This woman loves you with her whole soul," she said. "You think that she has slain Abdul Kerim by secret arts, in the hope that she may marry you."

"And your father also."

Then they were both silent, and Zehowah covered her face, since she could not prevent tears from falling when she thought of her father, whom she had loved.

"If this be so," she said, after a long time, "let the woman die immediately."

"It is necessary to be just," Khaled answered. "I will put no one to death without witnesses, not even a

captive woman, who is certainly an unbeliever at heart. Has any one seen her do these deeds, or does any one know by what means a man may be slain in his sleep, or at a feast, so that no mark is left upon his body? At Dereyiyah your father was alone with her in the inner part of the tent, and she was singing to him that he might sleep. For I have made inquiry. And when Abdul Kerim died he was also alone with her. I cannot understand these things. But you are a woman and subtle. It may be that you can see what is too dark for me."

"It may be. Therefore give her back to me, and I will lay a trap for her, so that she will betray herself if she has really done evil. And when we have convicted her by her own words she shall die."

"Are you not afraid, Zehowah?"

"Can I change my destiny? If my hour is come, I shall die of a fever, or of a cold, whether she be with me or not. But if my years are not full, she cannot hurt me."

"This is undoubtedly true," answered Khaled, who could find nothing to say. "But I will first question the woman myself."

So he sent slaves with a litter to bring Almasta from the house of mourning to the palace, and when she was come he sent out all the other women and remained alone with her and Zehowah, making her sit down before him so that he could see her face. Her cheeks were pale, for she had not slept, having been occupied in weeping and lamentation during the whole night,

and her eyes moved restlessly as those of a person distracted with grief.

Khaled then drew his sword and laid it across his feet as he sat and looked fixedly at Almasta.

"If you do not speak the truth," he said, "I will cut off your head with my own hand. Allah is witness."

When Almasta saw the drawn sword, her face grew whiter than before, and for some moments she seemed not able to breathe. But suddenly she began to beat her breast, and broke out into loud wailings, rocking herself to and fro as she sat on the carpet.

"My husband is dead!" she cried. "He was young; he was beautiful! He is dead! Wah! Wah! my husband is dead! Kill me too!"

Khaled looked at Zehowah, but she said nothing, though she watched Almasta attentively. Then Khaled spoke to the woman again.

"Make an end of lamenting for the present," he said.

"It has pleased Allah to take your husband to the fellowship of the faithful. Peace be upon him. Tell us in what manner he died, and what words he spoke when he felt his end approaching, for he was my good friend and I wish to know all."

Almasta either did not understand or made a pretence of not understanding, but when she heard Khaled's words she ceased from wailing and sobbed silently, beating her breast from time to time.

"How did he die?" Khaled asked in a stern voice.

"He was asleep. He died," replied Almasta, in broken tones.

"You will get no other answer," said Zehowah. "She cannot speak our tongue."

"Is there no woman among them all who can talk this woman's language?" asked Khaled with impatience, for he saw how useless it was to question her.

"There is no one. I have inquired. Leave her with me, and if there is anything to be known, I will try to find it out."

So Khaled went away and Zehowah endeavoured to soothe Almasta and make her talk in her broken words. But the woman made as though she would not be comforted, and went and sat apart upon the stone floor where there was no carpet, rocking to and fro, and wailing in a low voice. Zehowah understood that whatever the truth might be Almasta was determined to express her sorrow in the customary way, and that it would be better to leave her alone.

For seven days she sat thus apart, covering her head and mourning, and refusing to speak with any one, so that all the women supposed her to be indeed distracted with grief at the death of Abdul Kerim. And each day Khaled inquired of his wife whether she had yet learned anything, and received the same answer. But in the meantime he was occupied with his own thoughts as well as with the affairs of the kingdom, though the latter were as nothing in his mind compared with the workings of his heart when he thought of Zehowah.

It chanced one evening that Khaled was riding among the gardens without the city, attended only by a few horsemen, for he was simple in all his ways and

liked little to have a great throng of attendants about him. So he rode alone, while the horsemen followed at a distance.

"Was ever a man, or an angel, so placed in the world as I am placed?" he thought. "How much better would it have been had I never seen Zehowah, and if I had never slain the Indian prince. For I should still have been with my fellows, the genii, from whom I am now cut off, and at least I should have lived until the day of the resurrection. But now my horse may stumble and fall, and my neck may be broken, and there is no hereafter. Or I may die in my sleep, or be killed in my sleep, and there will be no resurrection for me, nor any more life, anywhere in earth or heaven. For Zehowah will never love me. Was ever a man so placed? And I am ashamed to complain to her any more, for she is a good wife, obedient and careful of my wants, and beautiful as the moon at the full, rising amidst palm trees, besides being very wise and subtle. How can I complain? Has she not given me herself, whom I desired, and a great kingdom, which, indeed, I did not desire, but which no man can despise as a gift? Yet I am burned up within, and my heart is melting as a piece of frankincense laid upon coals in an empty chamber, when no man cares for its sweet savour. Surely, I am the most wretched of mankind. Oh, that the angel who made garments for me of a ghada bush, and a bay mare of a locust, would come down and lay his hand upon Zehowah's breast and make a living heart of the stone which Allah has set in its place!"

So he rode slowly on, reasoning as he had often reasoned before, and reaching the same conclusion in all his argument, which availed him nothing. But suddenly, as the sun went down, a new thought entered his mind and gave him a little hope.

"The sun is gone down," he said to himself. "But Allah has not destroyed the sun. It will rise in the east to-morrow when the white cock crows in the first heaven. Many things have being, which the sight of man cannot see. It may be that although I see no signs of love in the heaven of Zehowah's eyes, yet love is already there and will before long rise as the sun and illuminate my darkness. For I am not subtle as the evil genii are, but I must see very clearly before I am able to distinguish."

He rode back into the city, planning how he might surprise Zehowah and obtain from her unawares some proof that she indeed loved him. To this end he entered the palace by a secret gate, covering his garments with his aba, and his head with the kefiyeh he wore, in order to disguise himself from the slaves and the soldiers whom he met on his way to the harem. He passed on towards Zehowah's apartment by an unlighted passage not generally used, and hid himself in a niche of the wall close to the open door, from which he could see all that happened, and hear what was said.

Zehowah was seated in her accustomed place and Almasta was beside her. Khaled could watch their faces by the light of the hanging lamps, as the two women talked together.

"You must put aside all mourning now," Zehowah was saying. "For I will find another husband for you."

"Another husband?" Almasta smiled and shook her head.

"Yes, there are other goodly men in Riad, though Abdul Kerim was of the goodliest, as all say who knew him. He was the Sultan's friend, but he was more soldier than courtier. He deserved a better death."

"Abdul Kerim died in peace. He was asleep." Almasta smiled still, but more sadly, and her eyes were cast down.

"He died in peace," Zehowah repeated, watching her narrowly. "But it is better to die in battle by the enemy's hand. Such a man, falling in the front of the fight for the true faith, enters immediately into paradise, to dwell for ever under the perpetual shade of the tree Sedrat, and neither blackness nor shame shall cover his face. There the rivers flow with milk and with clarified honey, and he shall rest on a couch covered with thick silk embroidered with gold, and shall possess seventy beautiful virgins whose eyes are blacker than mine and their skin whiter than yours, having colour like rubies and pearls, and their voices like the song of nightingales in Ajjem, of which travellers tell. These are the rewards of the true believer as set forth in Al Koran by our Prophet, upon whom peace. A man slain in battle for the faith enters directly into the possession of all this, but unbelievers shall be taken by the forelock and the heels and cast

into hell, to drink boiling molten brass, as a thirsty camel drinks clear water."

Almasta understood very little of what Zehowah said, but she smiled, nevertheless, catching the meaning of some of the words.

"The Sultan Khaled loves black eyes," she said. "He will go to paradise."

"Doubtless, he will quench his thirst in the incorruptible milk of heavenly rivers," Zehowah replied. "He is the chief of the brave, the light of the faith and the burning torch of righteousness. Otherwise Allah would not have chosen him to rule. But I spoke of Abdul Kerim."

"He died in peace," said Almasta the second time, and again looking down.

"I do not know how he died," Zehowah answered, looking steadily at the woman's face. "It was a great misfortune for you. Do you understand? I am very sorry for you. You would have been happy with Abdul Kerim."

"I mourn for him," Almasta said, not raising her eyes.

"It is natural and right. Doubtless you loved him as soon as you saw him."

Almasta glanced quickly at Zehowah, as though suspecting a hidden meaning in the words, and for a moment each of the women looked into the other's eyes, but Zehowah saw nothing. For a wise man has truly said that one may see into the depths of black eyes as into a deep well, but that blue eyes are like

the sea of Oman in winter, sparkling in the sun as a plain of blue sand, but underneath more unfathomable than the desert.

Almasta was too wise and deceitful to let the silence last. So when she had looked at Zehowah and understood, she smiled somewhat sorrowfully and spoke.

"I could have loved him," she said. "I desire no husband now."

"That is not true," Zehowah answered quickly. "You wish to marry Khaled, and that is the reason why you killed Abdul Kerim."

Almasta started as a camel struck by a flight of locusts.

"What is this lie?" she cried out with indignation. "Who has told you this lie?" But her face was as grey as a stone, and her lips trembled.

"You probably killed him by magic arts learned in your own country," said Zehowah, quietly. "Do not be afraid. We are alone, and no one can hear us. Tell me how you killed him. Truly it was very skilful of you, since the physician, who is the wisest man in Arabia, could not tell how it was done."

But Almasta began to beat her breast and to make oaths and asseverations in her own language, which Zehowah could not understand.

"If you will tell me how you did it, I will give you a rich gift," Zehowah continued.

But so much the more Almasta cried out, stretching her hands upwards and speaking incomprehensible words. So Zehowah waited until she became quiet again.

"It may be that Khaled will marry you, if you will tell me your secret," Zehowah said, after a time.

Then Almasta's cheek burned and she bent down her eyes.

"Will you tell me how to kill a man and leave no trace?" asked Zehowah, still pressing her. "Look at this pearl. Is it not beautiful? See how well it looks upon your hair. It is as the leaf of a white rose upon a river of red gold. And on your neck — you cannot see it yourself — it is like the full moon hanging upon a milky cloud. Khaled would give you many pearls like this if he married you. Will you not tell me?"

"Whom do you wish to kill?" Almasta asked, very suddenly. But Zehowah was unmoved.

"It may be that I have a private enemy," she said. "Perhaps there is one who disturbs me, against whom I plot in the night, but can find no way of ridding myself of him. A woman might give much to destroy such a one."

"Khaled will kill your enemies. He loves you. He will kill all whom you hate."

"You make progress. You speak our language better," said Zehowah, laughing a little. "You will soon be able to tell the Sultan that you love him, as well as I could myself."

"But you do not love him," Almasta answered boldly.

Zehowah bent her brows so that they met between her eyes as the grip of a bow. Then Khaled's heart leaped in his breast, for he saw that she was angry with the woman, and he supposed it was because she secretly

loved him. But he held his breath lest even his breathing should betray him.

"The portion of fools is fire," said Zehowah, not deigning to give any other answer. For she was a king's daughter and Almasta a bought slave, though Khaled had taken her in war.

"Be merciful!" exclaimed Almasta, in humble tones. "I am your handmaid, and I speak Arabic badly."

"You speak with exceeding clearness when it pleases you."

"Indeed I cannot talk in your language, for it is not long since I came into Arabia."

"We will have you taught, for we will give you a husband who will teach you with sticks. There is a certain hunchback, having one eye and marked with the smallpox, whose fists are as the feet of an old camel. He will be a good husband for you and will teach you the Arabic language, and your skin shall be dissolved but your mind will be enlightened thereby."

"Be merciful! I desire no husband."

"It is good that a woman should marry, even though the bridegroom be a hunchback. But if you will tell me your secret I will give you a better husband and forgive you."

"There is no secret! I have killed no one!" cried Almasta. "Who has told you the lie?"

"And moreover," continued Zehowah, not regarding her protestations, "there are other ways of learning secrets, besides by kindness; such, for instance, as sticks, and hot irons, and hunger and thirst in a prison

where there are reptiles and poisonous spiders, besides many other things with which I have no doubt the slaves of the palace are acquainted. It is better that you should tell your secret and be happy."

"There is no secret," Almasta repeated, and she would say nothing else, for she did not trust Zehowah and feared a cruel death if she told the truth.

But Zehowah wearied of the contest at last, being by no means sure that the woman had really done any evil, and having no intention of using any violent means such as she had suggested. For she was as just as she was wise and would have no one suffer wrongly. Khaled, indeed, cared little for the pain of others, having seen much blood shed in war, and would have caused Almasta to be tortured if Zehowah had desired it. But she did not, preferring to wait and see whether she could not entrap the slave into a confession.

Khaled now came out of his hiding-place into the room and advanced towards Zehowah, who remained sitting upon the carpet, while Almasta rose and made a respectful salutation. But neither of the women knew that he had been hidden in the niche. Zehowah did not seem surprised, but Almasta's face was white and her eyes were cast down, though indeed Khaled wished that it had been otherwise. He was encouraged, however, by what he had seen, for Zehowah had certainly been angry with Almasta on his account, and he dismissed the latter that he might be alone with his wife.

"You are wise, Zehowah," he said, "and gifted with much insight, but you will learn nothing from this

woman, though you talk with her a whole year. For she suspects you and is guarded in her speech and manner. I was standing by the doorway a long time. You did not see me, but I heard all that you said."

"Why did you hide yourself?" Zehowah asked, looking at him curiously.

"In order to listen," he answered. "And I heard something and saw something which pleased me. For when she said that you did not love me, you were angry."

"Did that please you? You are more easily pleased than I had thought. Shall I bear such things from a slave? How is it her business whether I love or not?"

"But you were angry," Khaled repeated, vainly hoping that she would say more, yet not wishing to press her too far, lest she should say again that she did not love him.

She, however, said nothing in reply, but busied herself in taking his kefiyeh from his head and his sword from his side that he might be at ease. He rested against the cushions and drank of the cool drink she offered him.

"This woman, Almasta, is exceedingly beautiful," he said at last. "It would indeed be a pity that a slave of such value should go into the possession of another so that we could see her no more. It is best that you should keep her with you."

Zehowah laughed a little, as she sat down beside him and began to play with her beads.

"This is what I have always said," she answered. "I will keep her with me."

"It is better so," said Khaled.

Then he remained silent in deep thought, having devised a new plan for gaining what he most desired. It seemed to him possible that Zehowah might be moved by jealousy, if by nothing else; for although he had sworn to her, and angrily, that he would never take Almasta for his wife, and though nothing could really have prevailed upon him to make him do so, yet it would be easy for him to talk to the woman and speak to her of her beauty, and appear to take delight in her singing, which was more melodious than that of a Persian nightingale. Since she would be now permanently established in his harem, nothing would be easier than for him to spend many hours in the woman's society. Being a simple-minded man the plan seemed to him subtle, and he determined to put it into execution without delay. He knew also that Almasta had loved him since the first day when she had been brought before him in the palace at Haïl, and this would make it still more easy to rouse Zehowah's jealousy.

Though she had herself advised him to marry Almasta, he did not believe that she was greatly in earnest, and he felt assured that if the possibility were presented before her, in such a way as to appear imminent, she would be deceived by the appearance.

"It is better that she should remain here," he said after a long time. "For we cannot put her to death without evidence of her guilt, and if we are obstinate in wishing to give her a husband, we do not know how many husbands she may destroy before she is satisfied.

She is beautiful, and will be an ornament in your kahwah. Indeed I do not know why I sent her away just now, when I came in. Let us call her back, that she may sing to us some of her own songs."

Zehowah clapped her hands and Almasta immediately returned, for she had indeed been waiting outside the door, endeavouring to hear what was said, since she suspected that Khaled would speak of her and ask questions. She understood well enough, and often much better than she was willing to show, though she could as yet speak but few words of the Arabic language.

"Sit at my feet," said Khaled, "and sing to me the songs of your own people."

Almasta took a musical instrument from the wall and sat down to sing. Her voice, indeed, was of enchanting sweetness, but as for the words of her songs, the seven wise men themselves could not have understood a syllable of them, seeing that they were neither Arabic nor Persian, nor even Greek. Nevertheless, Khaled made a pretence of being much pleased, resting his head against the cushions and closing his eyes as though the sound soothed him. As for Zehowah, she watched the woman with great curiosity, wondering whether it were possible that a creature so fair as Almasta could have done the evil deeds of which she was suspected, and planning how she might surprise her into a confession of guilt.

CHAPTER VII

Not many days passed after this, before the women of the harem began to whisper among themselves in the passages and outer chambers.

"See," they said, "how our master favours this foreign woman, who is in all probability a devil from the Persian mountains. Every day he will have her to sing to him, and to bring him drink, and to sit at his feet. And he has given her several bracelets of gold and a large ruby. Surely it will be better for us to flatter her and show her reverence, for if not she will before long give us sticks to eat, and we shall mourn our folly."

So they began to exhibit great respect for Almasta, giving her always the best seat amongst them and setting aside for her the best portions of the mutton, and the whitest of the rice, and the largest of the sweetmeats and the mellowest of the old sugar dates, so that Almasta fared sumptuously. But though she understood the reason why the women treated her so much more kindly than before, she was careful always to appear thankful and to speak softly to them, for she feared Zehowah, to whom they might speak of her, and who was very powerful with the Sultan. She was indeed secretly transported with joy, for she loved

Khaled and she began to think that before long he would marry her. This was her only motive, also, for she was not otherwise ambitious, and though she afterwards did many evil deeds, she did them all out of love for him.

Though Khaled was by no means soft-hearted, he could not but pity her sometimes, seeing how she was deceived by his kindness, while he was only making a pretence of preferring her in order to gain Zehowah's love. Often he sat long with closed eyes while she sang to him or played softly upon the barbat, and he tried to fancy that the voice and the presence were Zehowah's. But her strange language disturbed him, for there were sounds in it like the hissing of serpents and like choking, which caused him to start suddenly just when her voice was sweetest. For the Georgian tongue is barbarous and not like any human speech under the sun, resembling by turns the inarticulate warbling of birds, and the croaking of ravens, and the noises made by an angry cat. Nevertheless, Khaled always made a pretence of being pleased, though he enjoined upon Almasta to learn to sing in Arabic.

"For Arabic," he said to her, "is the language of paradise, and is spoken by all beings among the blessed, from Adam, our father, who waits for the resurrection in the first heaven, to the birds that fly among the branches of the tree Sedrat, near the throne of Allah, singing perpetually the verses of Al Koran. The black-eyed virgins reserved for the faithful, also speak only in Arabic."

"Shall I be of the Hur al Oyun of whom you speak?" Almasta inquired.

"How is it possible that you should be of the black-eyed ones, when your eyes are blue?" Khaled asked, laughing. "And besides, are you not an unbeliever?"

"I believe what you believe, and am learning your language. There is no Allah beside Allah."

"And Mohammed is Allah's prophet."

"And Mohammed is Allah's prophet," Almasta repeated devoutly.

"Good. And the six articles of belief are also necessary."

"Teach me," said Almasta, laying the barbat upon the carpet and folding her hands.

"You must believe first in Allah, and secondly in all the angels. Thirdly you must believe in Al Koran, fourthly in the prophets of Allah, fifthly in the resurrection of the dead and the last judgment, and lastly that your destiny is about your neck so that you cannot escape it."

"I believe in everything," said Almasta, who understood nothing of these sacred matters. "Shall I now be one of the Hur al Oyun?"

"But you have blue eyes."

"When I know that I am dying, I will paint them black," said Almasta, laughing sweetly.

"The angels Monkar and Nakir will discover your deception," said Khaled. "When you are dead and buried, these two angels, who are black, will enter

your tomb. They are of extremely terrible appearance. Then they will make you sit upright in the grave and will examine you first as to your belief and then as to your deeds. You will then not be able to tell lies. If you truly believe and have done good, your soul will then be breathed out of your lips and will float in a state of rest over your grave until the last judgment. But if not, the black angels will beat your head with iron maces, and tear your soul from your body with a torment greater than that caused by tearing the flesh from the bones."

"I believe in everything," Almasta said again, supposing that her assent would please him.

"You find it an easy matter to believe what I tell you," he said, for he could see that she would have received any other faith as readily. "But it is not easy for a woman to enter paradise, and since it is your destiny to have blue eyes, they will not become black. The Hur al Oyun, however, are not mortal women and no mortal woman can ever be one of them, since they are especially prepared for the faithful. But a man's wives may enter paradise with him, in a glorified beauty which may not be inferior to that of the black-eyed ones. If, for instance, Abdul Kerim had lived and been your husband, you might, by faith and good works, have entered heaven with him as one of his wives."

Almasta looked long at Khaled, trying to see whether he still suspected her, and indeed he found it very hard to do so, for her look was clear and

innocent as that of a young dove that is fed by a familiar hand.

"I would like to enter paradise with you," said Almasta, with an appearance of timidity. "Is it not possible?"

"It may be possible. But I doubt it," Khaled answered, with gravity.

In those days, while Khaled thus spent many hours with Almasta, Zehowah often remained for a long time in another part of the harem, either surrounded by her women, or sitting alone upon the balcony over the court, absorbed in watching the people who came and went. The slaves were surprised to see that Khaled seemed to prefer the society of the Georgian to that of his wife, but they dared say nothing to Zehowah and contented themselves with watching her face and endeavouring to find out whether she were displeased at what was happening, or really indifferent as she appeared to be.

Almasta herself was distrustful, supposing that Khaled and Zehowah were in league together to entrap her into a self-accusation, and though her heart was transported with happiness while she was with Khaled, yet she did not forget to be cautious whenever any reference was made to Abdul Kerim's death. She also took the long needle out of her hair and hid it carefully in a corner, in a crevice between the pavement and the wall, lest it should at any time fall from its place and bring suspicion upon her.

Khaled watched Zehowah as narrowly as the women

did, to see whether any signs of jealousy showed themselves in her face, and sometimes they talked together of Almasta.

"It is strange," said Khaled, "that Allah, being all powerful, should have provided matter for dissension on earth by creating one woman more beautiful than another, the one with blue eyes, the other with black, the one with red hair and the other with hair needing henna to brighten it. Are not all women the children of one mother?"

"And are not all men her sons also?" asked Zehowah. "It is strange that Allah, being all powerful, should have provided matter for sorrow by creating one man with a spirit easily satisfied, and the other with a soul tormented by discontent."

Khaled looked fixedly at his wife, and bent his brows. But in secret he was glad, for he supposed that she was beginning to be jealous. However, he made a pretence of being displeased.

"Is man a rock that he should never change?" he asked. "Or has he but one eye with which to see but one kind of beauty? Have I not two hands, two feet, two ears, two nostrils and two eyes?"

"That is true," Zehowah answered. "But a man has only one heart with which to love, one voice with which to speak kind words, and one mouth with which to kiss the woman he has chosen. And if a man had two souls, they would rend him so that he would be mad."

At this Khaled laughed a little and would gladly

have shown Zehowah that she was right. But he feared to be treated with indifference, if he yielded to her argument so soon, and he held his peace.

"Nevertheless," Zehowah continued, after a time, "you are right and so am I. You said, indeed, not many days ago that your two hands should wither at the wrists if you took another wife, yet I advised you to do so; and now it is clear from what you say that you wish to marry Almasta. I am your handmaiden. Take her, therefore, and be contented, for she loves you."

But now Khaled was much disturbed as to what he should answer, for he had hoped that Zehowah would break out into jealous anger. He could not accept her advice, because of his oath and still more because of his love for her; yet he could not send away Almasta, since by so doing he would be giving over his last hope of obtaining Zehowah's love by rousing her jealousy.

"Take her," Zehowah repeated. "The palace is wide and spacious. There is room for us both, and for two others also, if need be, according to divine law. Take her, and let there be contentment. Have you not said that she is more beautiful than I?"

"No," answered Khaled, "I have not said so."

"You have thought it, which is much the same, for you said that her hair was red but that mine needed henna to brighten it. Marry her therefore, this very day. Send for the Kadi, and order a feast, and let it be done quickly."

"Is it nothing to you, whether I take her or not?"

Khaled asked, seeking desperately for something to say.

"Is it for me to set myself up against the holy law? Or did any one exact from you a promise that you would not take another wife? And if you rashly promised anything of your own free will, the promise is not binding seeing that there is no authority for it in Al Koran, and that no one desires you to keep it — neither I, nor Almasta."

Zehowah laughed at her own speech, and Khaled was too much disturbed to notice that the laugh was rather of scorn than of mirth.

"How shall I take a woman who is perhaps a murderess?" he asked. "Shall I take her who was perhaps the cause of your revered father's death? May Allah give him peace! Surely, the very thought is terrible to me, and I will not do it."

"Will you convict her without witnesses? And where is your witness? Did not the physician explain the reason of the death, and did he suspect that there was anything unnatural about it? But if you still think that she destroyed my father and Abdul Kerim — peace on them both — why do you make her sit all day long at your feet and sing to you in her barbarous language, which resembles the barking of jackals? And why do you command her to bring you drink and fan you when it is hot, and you sleep in the afternoon? This shows a forgiving and trustful disposition."

"This is an unanswerable argument," thought Khaled, being very much perplexed. "Can I answer

that I do all this in order to see whether Zehowah is jealous? She would certainly laugh to herself and say in her heart that she has married a fool."

So he said nothing, but bent his brows again, and endeavoured to seem angry. But Zehowah took no notice of his face and continued to urge him to marry Almasta.

"Have you ever seen such a woman?" she asked. "Have you ever seen such eyes? Are they not like twin heavens of a deep blue, each having a shining sun in the midst? Is not her hair like seventy thousand pieces of gold poured out upon the carpet from a height? Her nose is a straight piece of pure ivory. Her lips are redder than pomegranates when they are ripe, and her cheeks are as smooth as silk. Moreover she is as white as milk, freshly taken from the camel, whereas my hands are of the colour of blanket-bread before it is baked."

"Your hands are much smaller than hers," said Khaled, who could not suffer Zehowah to discredit her own beauty.

"I do not know," she answered, looking at her fingers. "But they are less white. And Almasta is far more beautiful than I. You yourself said so."

"I never said so," Khaled replied, more and more perplexed. "There are two kinds of beauty. That is what I said. Allah has willed it. Almasta is a slave, and her hands are large. It is a pity, for she is like a mare that has many good points, but whose hoofs are overgrown through too much idleness in the stable. I

say that there are two kinds of beauty. Yours is that of the free woman of a pure and beautiful race; hers is that of the slave accidentally born beautiful."

Zehowah gathered up her three long black tresses and laid them across her knees as she sat. Then she shook off her golden bracelets, one after the other, to the number of a score and heaped them upon the hair.

"Which do you like best?" she asked. "The black or the gold? The day or the night? Here you see them together and can judge fairly between them."

Khaled sought for a crafty answer and made a pretence of pondering the matter deeply.

"After the night," he said at last, "the day is very bright and glorious. But when we have looked on it long, only the night can bring rest and peace."

He was pleased with himself when he had made this answer, supposing that Zehowah would find nothing to say. But he had only laid a new trap for himself.

"That is quite true," she answered, laughing. "That is also the reason why Allah made the day and the night to follow each other in succession, lest men should grow weary of eternal light or eternal darkness. For the same reason also, since you have a wife whose hair is black, I counsel you to take a red-haired one. In this way you will obtain that variety which the taste of man craves."

"If I follow your advice, you will regret it," said Khaled.

"You think I shall be jealous, but you are mistaken.

I am what I am. Can another woman make me more or less beautiful? Moreover, I shall always be first in the palace, though you take three other wives. The others will rise up when you come in, but I shall remain sitting. I shall always be the first wife."

"Undoubtedly, that is your right," Khaled replied. "Do you suppose that I wish to put any woman in your place?"

Then Zehowah laughed, and laid her hand upon Khaled's arm.

"How foolish men are!" she exclaimed. "Do you think you can deceive me? Do you imagine, because I have answered you and talked with you to-day, and listened to your arguments, that I do not understand your heart? Oh, Khaled, this is true which you often say of yourself, that your wit is in your arm. If I were a warrior and stood before you with a sword in my hand, you could argue better, for you would cut off my head, and the argument would end suddenly. But Allah has not made you subtle, and words in your mouth are of no more avail than a sword would be in mine, for you entangle yourself in your own language, as I should wound myself if I tried to handle a weapon."

At this Khaled was much disconcerted, and he stroked his beard thoughtfully, looking away so as not to meet her eyes.

"I do not know what you mean," he said, at last. "You certainly imagine something which has no existence."

"I imagine nothing, for I have seen the truth, ever since the first day when you desired to be alone with Almasta. You are only foolishly trying to make me jealous of her, in order that I may love you better."

When Khaled saw that she understood him, he was without any defence, for he had built a wall of sand for himself, like a child playing in the desert, which the first breath of wind causes to crumble, and the second blast leaves no trace of it behind.

"And am I foolish, because I have done this thing?" he cried, not attempting to deny the truth. "Am I a fool because I desire your love? But it is folly to speak of it, for you will reproach me and say that I am discontented, and will offer me another woman for my wife. Go. Leave me alone. If you do not love me, the sight of you is as vinegar poured into a fresh wound, and as salt rubbed into eyes that are sore with the sand. Go. Why do you stay? Do you not believe me? Do you wish me to kill you that I may have peace from you? It is a pity that you did not marry one of the hundred suitors who came before me, for you certainly loved one of them, since you cannot love me. You doubtless loved the Indian prince. Would you have him back? I can give you his bones, for I slew him with my own hands and buried him in the Red Desert, where his soul is sitting upon a heap of sand, waiting for the day of resurrection."

Then Zehowah was greatly astonished, for neither she nor any one else had ever known what had been the end of that suitor, and after waiting a long time,

his people who had been with him had departed sorrowing to their own country, and she had heard no more of them.

"What is this?" she asked in amazement. "Why did you kill him? And how could you have done this thing unseen, since he was guarded by many attendants?"

"I took him out of the palace in the night, when all were asleep, and then I killed him," said Khaled, and Zehowah could get no other answer, for he would not confess that he had been one of the genii, lest she should not believe the truth, or else, believing, should be afraid of him in the future.

"I will give you his bones," he said, "if you desire them, for I know where they are, and you certainly loved him, and are still mourning for him. If he could be alive, I would kill him again."

"I never loved him," Zehowah answered, at last. "How was it possible? But I would perhaps have married him, hoping to convert all his people to the true faith."

"As you have married me in the hope, or the assurance, of giving your people a just king."

"You are angry, Khaled. And, indeed, I could be angry, too, but with myself and not with you, as you are with me, though it be for the same reason. For I begin to see and understand why you are discontented, and indeed I will do what I can to satisfy you."

"You must love me, as I love you, if you would save me from destruction," said Khaled.

Though Zehowah could not comprehend the meaning of the words, she saw by his face that he was terribly moved, and she herself began to be more sorry for him.

"Indeed, Khaled," she said, "I will try to love you from this hour. But it is a hard thing, because you cannot explain it, and it is not easy to learn what cannot be explained. Do you think that all women love their husbands in this way you mean? Am I unlike all the rest?"

Khaled took her hand and held it, and looked into her eyes.

"Love is the first mystery of the world," he said. "Death is the second. Between the two there is nothing but a weariness darkened with shadows and thick with mists. What is gold? A cinder that glows in the darkness for a moment and falls away to a cold ash in our hand when we have taken it. But love is a treasure which remains. What is renown? A cry uttered in the bazaar by men whose minds are subject to change as their bodies are to death. But the voice of love is heard in paradise, singing beside the fountains Tasnim and Salsahil. What is power? A net with which to draw wealth and fame from the waters of life? To what end? We must die. Or is power a sword to kill our enemies? If their time is come they will die without the sword. Or is it a stick to purify the hides of fools? The fool will die also, like his master, and both will be forgotten. But they who love shall enter the seventh heaven together,

according to the promise of Allah. Death is stronger than man or woman, but love is stronger than death, and all else is but a vision seen in the desert, having no reality."

"I will try to understand it, for I see that you are very unhappy," said Zehowah.

She was silent after this, for Khaled's words were earnest and sank into her soul. Yet the more she tried to imagine what the passion in him could be like, the less she was able to understand it, for some of Khaled's actions had been foolish, but she supposed that there must have been some wisdom in them, having its foundation in the nature of love.

"What he says is true," she thought. "I married him in order to give my people a just and brave king, and he is both brave and just. And I am certainly a good wife, for I should be dissolved in shame if another man were to see my face, and moreover I am careful of his wants, and I take his kefiyeh from his head with my own hands, and smooth the cushions for him and bring him food and drink when he desires it. Or have I withheld from him any of the treasures of the palace, or stood in the way of his taking another wife? Until to-day, I thought indeed that this talk of love meant but little, and that he spoke of it because he desired an excuse for marrying Almasta who loves him. But when I said at a venture that he wished to make me jealous, he confessed the truth. Now all the tales of love told by the old women are of young persons who have seen each other from a distance, but are

hindered from marrying. And we are already married. Surely, it is very hard to understand."

After this Khaled never called Almasta to sit at his feet and sing to him, as he had done before, and Zehowah was constantly with him in her stead. At first Almasta supposed that Khaled only made a pretence of disregarding her, out of respect for his wife, but she soon perceived that he was indifferent and no longer noticed her. She then grew fierce and jealous, and her voice was not heard singing in the harem; but she went and took her needle again from the crevice in the pavement and hid it in her hair, and though Zehowah often called her, when Khaled was not in the house, she made as though she understood even less of the Arabic language than before and sat stupidly on the carpet, gazing at her hands. Zehowah wearied of her silence, for she understood the reason of it well enough.

"I am tired of this woman," she said to Khaled. "Do you think I am jealous of her now?"

Khaled smiled a little, but said nothing, only shaking his head.

"I am tired of her," Zehowah repeated. "She sits before me like a sack of barley in a grainseller's shop, neither moving nor speaking."

"She is yours," Khaled answered. "Send her away. Or we will give her in marriage to one of the sheikhs who will take her away to the desert. In this way she will not be able even to visit you except when her husband comes into the city."

But they decided nothing at that time. Some days

later Khaled was sitting alone upon a balcony, Zehowah having gone to the bath, when Almasta came suddenly before him and threw herself at his feet, beating her forehead and tearing her hair, though not indeed in a way to injure it.

"What have I done?" she cried. "Why is my lord displeased?"

Khaled looked at her in surprise, but answered nothing at first.

"Why are my lord's eyes like frozen pools by the Kura, and why is his forehead like Kasbek in a mist?"

Khaled laughed a little at her words.

"Kasbek is far from Riad," he answered, "and the waters of the Kura do not irrigate the Red Desert. I am not displeased. On the contrary, I will give you a husband and a sufficient dowry. Go in peace."

But Almasta remained where she was, weeping and beating her forehead.

"Let me stay!" she cried. "Let me stay, for I love you. I will eat the dust under your feet. Only let me stay."

"I think not," Khaled answered. "You weary Zehowah with your silence and your sullenness."

"Let me stay!" she repeated, over and over again.

She was not making any pretence of grief, for the tears ran down abundantly and stained the red leather of Khaled's shoes. Though he was hard-hearted he was not altogether cruel, for a man who loves one woman greatly is somewhat softened towards all such as do not stand immediately in his way.

"It is true," he thought, "that I have given this woman some occasion of hope, for I have treated her kindly during many days, and she has probably supposed that I would marry her. For she is less keen-sighted than Zehowah, and moreover she loves me."

"Do not drive me out!" cried Almasta. "For I shall die if I cannot see your face. What have I done?"

"You have indeed done nothing worthy of death, for I cannot prove that you killed Abdul Kerim. I will therefore give you a good husband and you shall be happy."

But Almasta would not go away, and embracing his knees she looked up into his face, imploring him to let her remain. Khaled could not but see that she was beautiful, for the mid-day light fell upon her white face and her red lips, and made shadows in her hair of the colour of mellow dates, and reflections as bright as gold when the burnisher is still in the goldsmith's hand. Though he cared nothing for Almasta and little for her sorrow, his eye was pleased and he smiled.

Then he looked up and saw Zehowah standing before him, just as she had come from the bath, wrapped in loose garments of silk and gold. He gazed at her attentively for there was a distant gleam of light in her eyes and her cheeks were warm, though she stood in the shadow, so that he thought she had never been more beautiful, and he did not care to look at Almasta's face again.

"Why is Almasta lamenting in this way?" Zehowah asked.

"She desires to stay in the palace," Khaled answered; "but I have told her that she shall be married, and yet she wishes to stay."

"Let her be married quickly, then. Is she a free woman, that she should resist, or is she rich that she should refuse alms? Let her be married."

"There is a certain young man, cousin to Abdul Kerim, a Bedouin of pure descent. Let him take her, if he will, and let the marriage be celebrated tomorrow."

But Almasta shook her head, and her tears never ceased from flowing.

"You will marry him," said Khaled. "And if any harm comes to him, I will cause you to be put to death before the second call to prayer on the following morning."

When Almasta heard this, her tears were suddenly dried and her lips closed tightly. She rose from the floor and retired to a distance within the room.

On that day Khaled sent for the young man of whom he had spoken, whose name was Abdullah ibn Mohammed el Herir, and offered him Almasta for a wife. And he accepted her joyfully, for he had heard of her wonderful beauty, and was moreover much gratified by being given a woman whom the former Sultan would probably have married if he had lived. Khaled also gave him a grey mare as a wedding gift, and a handsome garment.

The marriage was therefore celebrated in the customary manner, and no harm came to Abdullah. But as the autumn had now set in, he soon afterwards left the city, taking Almasta with him, to live in tents, after the manner of the Bedouins.

CHAPTER VIII

Abdullah ibn Mohammed, though a young man, was now the sheikh of a considerable tribe which had frequently done good service to the late Sultan, Zehowah's father, and which had also borne a prominent part in the recent war. Abdul Kerim, whom Almasta had murdered, had been the sheikh during his lifetime, and if the claims of birth had been justly considered, his son, though a mere boy, should have succeeded him. But Abdullah had found it easy to usurp the chief place, and in the council which was held after Abdul Kerim's death he was chosen by acclamation. It chanced, too, that he was not married at the time when he took Almasta, for of two wives the one had died of a fever during the summer, and he had divorced the other on account of her unbearable temper, having been deceived in respect of this by her parents, who had assured him that she was as gentle as a dove and as submissive as a lamb. But she had turned out to be as quarrelsome as a wasp and as unmanageable as an untrained hawk, so he divorced her, and the more readily because she was not beautiful and her dower had been insignificant. Almasta therefore found that she was her husband's only wife.

She would certainly have killed him, as she had killed Abdul Kerim, and, indeed, the late Sultan, in the hope of being taken back into the palace, but she was prevented by the fear of death, for she had seen that Khaled's threat was not empty, and would be executed if harm came to Abdullah after his marriage. She accordingly set herself to please him, and first of all she learned to speak the Arabic language, in order that she might sing to him in his own tongue and tell him tales of distant countries, which she had learned in her own home.

Abdullah passed the months of autumn and the early winter in the desert, moving about from place to place, as is the custom of the Bedouins, it being his intention to reach a northerly point of Ajman in the spring, in order to fall upon the Persian pilgrims and extort a ransom before they entered the territory of Nejed. For it would not be lawful to attack them after that, since there was a treaty with the Emir of Basrah, allowing the pilgrims a safe and free passage towards Mecca, for which the Emir paid yearly a sum of money to the Sultan of Nejed.

But Almasta knew nothing of this, for she was wholly ignorant of the desert; and moreover Abdullah was a cautious man, who held that whatsoever is to be kept secret must not be uttered aloud, though there be no one within three days' journey to hear it.

Abdullah treated her with great consideration, not obliging her to weary herself overmuch with cooking and other work of the tents. For he rejoiced in her

beauty and in the sweetness of her voice, and his chief delight was to sit in the door of the tent at night, chewing frankincense, while Almasta sat within, close behind him, and told him tales of her own country, or of the life in the palace of Riad. The latter indeed was as strange to him as the former, and much more interesting.

Now one evening they were alone together in this manner, and it was not yet very cold. But the stars shone brightly as though there would be a frost before morning, and the other tents were all closed and no one was near the coals which remained from the fire after baking the blanket-bread. One might hear the chewing of the camels in the dark, and the tramping of a mare that moved slowly about, her hind feet being chained together.

"Tell me more of the palace at Riad," said Abdullah. "For your Kura, and your snow-covered Kasbek, and your Tiflis with its warm springs and gardens, I shall never see. But I have seen the courts of the palace from my youth, and the Sultan's kahwah, and the latticed windows of the harem, from which you say that you saw me and loved me in the last days of summer."

Almasta had said this to please him, though it was not true. For she knew that men easily believe what flatters them, as women believe that what they desire must come to pass.

"The palace is a wonderful palace," said Almasta, "and I will tell you of the treasures which are in it."

"That is what I wish to hear," answered Abdullah, putting a piece of frankincense into his mouth and beginning to chew it. "Tell me of the treasures, for it is said that they are great and of extraordinary value."

"The value of them cannot be calculated, O Abdullah, for if you had seventy thousand hands and on each hand seventy thousand fingers, you could not count upon your fingers in a whole lifetime the gold sherifs and sequins and tomans which are hidden away there in bags. Beneath the court of strangers there is a great chamber built of stone in which the sacks of gold are kept, and they are piled up to the roof of the vault on all sides and in the middle, leaving only narrow passages between."

"If it is all gold, what is the use of the passages?" asked Abdullah.

"I do not know, but they are there, and there is another room filled with silver in the same manner. There are also secret places underground, in which jewels are kept in chests, rubies and pearls and Indian diamonds and emeralds, in such quantities that they would suffice to make necklaces of a thousand rows each for each of the mountains in my country. And we have many mountains, great ones, not such as the little hills you have seen, but several days' journey in height. For we say that when the Lord made the earth it was at first unsteady, and He set our mountains upon it, in the middle, to make it firm, and it has never moved since."

"I do not believe this," said Abdullah. "Tell me more about the jewels in Riad."

"There is no end of them. They are like the grains of sand in the desert, and no one of them is worth less than a thousand gold sherifs. I do not even know the names of the different kinds, but there are turquoises without number, of the Maidan, and all good, so that you may write upon them with a piece of gold as with a pen; and there are red stones as large as a dove's egg, red and fiery as the wine of Kachetia, and others, blue as the sky in winter, and yellow ones, and some with leaves of gold in them, like morsels of treng floating in the juice. But besides the gold and silver and precious stones there are thousands of rich garments which are kept in chests of fragrant wood, in upper chambers, abas woven of gold and silk and linen, and vests embroidered with pearls, and shoes of which even the soles appear to be of gold. And there are great pieces of stuff, Indian silk, and Persian velvet, and even satin from Stamboul, woven by unbelievers with the help of devils. Then, too, in the palace of Riad, there are stored great quantities of precious weapons, most of them made in Syria, with many swords of Shām, which you say are the best, though I do not understand the matter, each having an inscription in letters of gold upon the blade, and the hilt most cunningly chiselled in the same metal, or carved out of ivory."

"I saw the treasure of Haïl when we took it away after the war, and most of it was distributed among us, but there was nothing like this," said Abdullah.

"The treasure of Haïl is to the treasure of Riad, as a small black fly walking upon the face of the sun," answered Almasta. "And yet there was wealth there also, and there was much which you never saw. For that Khaled, who is now Sultan, is crafty and avaricious, and he loaded many camels secretly by night, being helped by black slaves, all of whom he slew afterwards with his own hand lest they should tell the tale, and he then called camel-drivers and sent them away with the beasts to Riad. And he said to them: 'These are certain loads of fine wheat and of mellow dates, for the Sultan's table, such as cannot be found in Riad.' But he sent a letter to his father-in-law, who caused all the packs to be taken immediately to one of the secret chambers, where he and his daughter Zehowah took out the jewels and stored them with their own. And as for me, I believe that Khaled made an end of the Sultan himself by means of poison in Dereyiyah, for he rode away suddenly after they had met, as though his conscience smote him."

"What is this evil tale which you are telling me?" cried Abdullah. "Surely, it is a lie, for Khaled is a brave man who gives every one his due and deceives no one. And he is by no means subtle, for I have heard him in council, and he generally said only, 'Smite,' but sometimes he said 'Strike,' and that was all his eloquence. But whether he said the one or the other, he was generally the first to follow his own advice, which, indeed, by the merciful dispensation of

Allah, procured us the victory. But what is this tale which you have invented?"

"And who is this Khaled whom you praise?" asked Almasta. "And how can you know his craftiness as I know it, who have lived in the palace and braided his wife's hair, and brought him drink when he was thirsty? Is he a man of your tribe whose descent you can count upon your fingers, from him to his grandfather and to Ishmael and Abraham? Or is he a man of a tribe known to you, and whose generations you also know? Has any man called him Khaled ibn Mohammed, or Khaled ibn Abdullah? Or has he ever spoken of his father, who is probably now drinking boiling water, and the black angels are pounding his head with iron maces. Yet he says that he came from the desert. Then you, who are of the desert, do not know the desert, for you do not know whence he is. But there are those who do know, and he fears them, lest they should tell the truth and destroy him."

"These are idle tales," said Abdullah. "Is it probable that the Sultan would have bestowed his daughter and all the treasures you have described upon such a man without having made inquiries concerning his family. And if the Sultan said nothing to us about it, and if Khaled holds his peace, they have doubtless their reasons. For it may be that there is a blood feud between the people of Khaled and some great person in Riad, so that he would be in danger of his life if he revealed his father's name. Allah knows. It is not our business."

"O Abdullah, you are simple, and you believe all things!" cried Almasta. "But I heard of him in Basrah."

"What did you hear in Basrah? And how could you have heard of him there?"

"I was in the Emir's harem, being kept there to rest from the journey after they had brought me from the north. And there I heard of Khaled, for the women talked of him, having been told tales about him by a merchant who was admitted to the palace."

"Now this is great folly," answered Abdullah. "For Khaled came suddenly to Riad, and was married immediately to Zehowah, and on the next day he went out with us against Haïl, which we took from the Shammar in three weeks' time from the day of our marching. Moreover we found you there in the palace. How then could news of Khaled have reached Basrah before you left that place?"

"I had come to Haïl but the day before you attacked the city," said Almasta. "But did I say that I had heard of him as already married to Zehowah?"

For she saw that she had run the risk of being found out in a lie, and she made haste to defend herself.

"What did you hear of him?" asked Abdullah.

"He was a notable fellow and a robber," answered Almasta. "For he is a Persian, and a Shiyah, who offers prayers to Ali in secret. But because he had done many outrageous deeds, a great price was set upon his head throughout Persia, so he fled into Arabia and by his boldness and craft he married Zehowah.

And now he has made a secret covenant to deliver over the kingdom of Nejed to the Persians."

Then Abdullah laughed aloud.

"Who shall deliver over the Bedouin to a white-faced people, who live on boiled chestnuts and ride astride of a camel? And when a man has got a kingdom, why should he give it up to any one, except under force?"

"There is a reason for this, too," Almasta answered unabashed. "For the King of the Persians, whom they call the Padeshah, had an only daughter, of great beauty, and Khaled is to receive her in marriage as the price of Nejed. Then he will by treachery destroy the Padeshah's sons and will inherit Persia also, as he has inherited Nejed; and after that he will make war upon the Romans in Stamboul and will become the master of the whole world."

"This is a strange tale, and seems full of madness," said Abdullah. "I do not believe it. Tell me rather a story of your own country, and afterwards we will sleep, for to-morrow we will leave this place."

"I will tell you a wonderful history, which is quite true," answered Almasta. "Take this fresh piece of frankincense which I have prepared for you, and put it into your mouth, for you will then not interrupt me with questions while I am speaking."

So Abdullah took the savoury gum and chewed it, and Almasta told him the tale which here follows.

"There is in the north, beyond Persia, a great and prosperous kingdom, lying between two seas, and re-

sembling paradise for its wonderful beauty. All the hills are covered with trees of every description in which innumerable birds make their nests, all of a beautiful plumage and good for man to eat. And in these forests there are also great herds of animals, whose name I do not know in Arabic, having branching horns and kindred to the little beast which you call the cow of the desert, but far better to eat and as large as full-grown camels. A man who is hungry need only shoot an arrow at a venture, for the birds and animals are so numerous that he will certainly hit something. This kingdom is watered everywhere by rivers and streams abounding in fish, all good to eat and easily caught, and all the valleys are filled with vineyards of black and white grapes. But the people of this country are chiefly Christians. May Allah send them enlightenment! Now the King was an old man, who delighted in feasting and cared little for the affairs of the nation, preferring a lute to a sword, and a wine-cup to a shield, and the feet of dancing girls to the hoofs of war horses. He had no son to go out to war for him, but only one beautiful daughter."

"Like the Sultan of our country who died," said Abdullah.

"Very much. There were also other points of resemblance. Now there was a certain Tartar in the kingdom of Samarkand, called Ismaïl, who was a robber and had destroyed many caravans on the march, and had broken into many houses both in Samarkand and Tashkent, a notable evildoer. But having one

day stolen a fleet mare from the Sultan's stables, the soldiers pursued him, and in order to escape impalement he fled. No one could catch him because the mare he had stolen was the fleetest in Great Tartary. So he rode westward through many countries, and by the shores of the inland sea, until he came to the kingdom which I have described. There he hid himself in the forest for some time and waylaid travellers, making them tell him all that they knew of the kingdom, and afterwards killing them. But when he had obtained all that he wanted, both rich garments and splendid weapons, and the necessary information, he left the forest and rode into the capital city. Then he went to the King and desired of him a private audience, which was granted. He said that he was the son of a powerful Christian prince, and had been taken captive by the Tartars, but had escaped, and he offered to make all Tartary subject to the King, if only he might marry his daughter. And whether by magic, or by eloquence, he succeeded, for the King was old and feeble-minded. But soon after the wedding, he poisoned his father-in-law and became king in his place, though there were many in the land who had a better right, being closely connected with the royal blood."

"This is the story of Khaled," said Abdullah. "I know the truth. Why do you weary me, trying to deceive me, and calling him a robber? But it is true that in Nejed there are men of good descent who have a better right to sit on the throne."

"Hear what followed," answered Almasta. "This

man Ismaïl afterwards took captive a woman of the Tartars, who knew who he was, though he supposed her ignorant. And he gave her in marriage to the youngest and bravest of his captains, a man to whom Allah had vouchsafed the tongue of eloquence, and the teeth of strength, and the lips of discretion to close together and hide both at the proper season. The woman told her husband who Ismaïl was, and instructed him concerning the palace, its passages and secret places, and the treasures that were hidden there. And she told him also that Ismaïl had made a covenant with the Sultan of his own country, which would bring destruction upon the nation he now ruled. For she loved her husband on account of his youth and beauty, and she had embraced his faith and was ready to die for him."

"The husband's name was Abdullah," said Abdullah. "And he also loved his wife, who surpassed other women in beauty, as a bay mare surpasses pigs."

"He afterwards loved her still better," answered Almasta, "for though he was only chief over four hundred tents, she gave him a kingdom. Hear what followed. But I will call him Abdullah if you please, though his name was Mskhet."

"Allah is merciful! There are no such names in Arabia. This one is like the breaking of earthen vessels upon stones. Call him Abdullah."

"Abdullah therefore went to the wisest and most discreet of his kindred, and spoke to them of the great treasures which were hidden in the palace, and he

pointed out to their obscured sight that all this wealth had been got by them and their fathers in war, and had been taken in tithes from the people, and was now in the possession of Ismaïl. And they talked among themselves and saw that this was indeed true. And at another time, he told them that Ismaïl was not really of their religion, but a hypocrite. And again a third time he told them the whole truth, so that their hearts burned when they knew that their King was but a robber who had been condemned to death. Though they were discreet men, the story was in some way told abroad among the soldiers, doubtless by the intervention of angels, so that all the people knew it, and were angry against Ismaïl and ready to break out against him so soon as a man could be found to lead them.

"But," said Abdullah, "this Ismaïl doubtless had a strong guard of soldiers about him, and had given gifts to his captains, and shown honour to them, so that they were attached to him."

"Undoubtedly," replied Almasta, "and but for his wife, Abdullah could not have succeeded. She advised him to go to his discreet kindred and friends and say to them, 'See, if you will afterwards support me, I will go alone into the palace and will get the better of this Ismaïl, when he is asleep, and I will so do that the soldiers shall not oppose me. And afterwards, you will all enter together and the treasure shall be divided. But we will throw some of it to the people, lest they be disappointed.' And so he did. For his wife knew the secret entrances to the palace and took him in with

her by night, disguised as a woman. And they went together silently into the harem, and slew Ismaïl and bound his wife, and took the keys of the treasure chambers from under the pillow. After this they took from the gold as many bags as there were soldiers, and waked each man, giving him a sack of sherifs, and bidding him take as much more as he could find, for the King was dead. Then Abdullah's friends were admitted and they divided the treasure, and went abroad before it was day, calling upon the people that Ismaïl was dead and that a man of their own nation was King in his place, and scattering handfuls of gold into every house as they passed. And, behold, before the second call to prayer, Abdullah was King, and all the people came and did homage to him. And Abdullah himself was astonished when he saw how easy it had been, and loved his wife even better than before."

So Almasta finished her tale and there was silence for a time, while Abdullah sat still and gazed at the closed tents in the starlight, and listened to the distant chewing of the camels.

"Give me some water," he said at last. "I am very thirsty."

She brought him drink from the skin, and soon afterwards he lay down to rest. But they said nothing more to each other that night of the story which Almasta had told.

On the following day they journeyed fully eleven hours, to a place where there was much water, and in the evening, when the camels were chewing, and

all the Bedouins had eaten and were resting in their tents, Abdullah sat again in his accustomed place.

"Almasta, light of my darkness," he said, "I would gladly hear again something of the tale you told me last night, for I have not remembered it well, being overburdened with the cares of my people and the direction of the march. Surely you said that when the woman and her husband had killed Ismaïl they took the keys of the treasure chambers from under his pillow. Is it not so?"

"They did so, Abdullah."

"And they immediately went and took the gold and gave it to the guards? But I have forgotten, for it is a matter of little importance, being but a tale."

"That is what they did," answered Almasta.

"But surely this is a fable. How could the woman know the way to the treasure chambers and find it in the dark? For you said also that these secret places were underground and therefore a great way from the harem."

"I did not say that, Abdullah, for the secret places underground are those in Riad, which I described to you before I began the other story."

"This may be true, for I am very forgetful. But I daresay that the treasures in the city you described were also hidden in similar places."

"Since you speak of this, I remember that it was so. The glorious light of your intelligence penetrates the darkness of my memory and makes it clear. The places were exactly similar."

"How then could the woman, who only knew the harem, find her way in the dark, and lead her husband, to a part of the palace which she had never visited? This is a hard thing."

"It was not hard for her. She had seen Ismaïl open with his key a door in his sleeping chamber, and he had gone in and after some time had returned bearing sacks of gold pieces. Was this a hard thing? Or does a wise man make two doors to his treasure-house, the one for himself and the other for thieves? The one leading to his own chamber, for his own use, and the other opening upon the highway for the convenience of robbers? It is possible, but I think not. Ismaïl had but one door. He was not an Egyptian jackass."

"This is reasonable," said Abdullah. "And I am now satisfied. But my imagination was not at rest, for the story is a good one and deserves to be well told."

After this Abdullah wandered for a long time with the Bedouins who accompanied him, often changing his direction, so that they wondered whither he was leading them, and began to question him. But he answered that he had heard secretly of a great spoil to be taken, and that they should all have a share of it, and whenever they came upon Arabs of another tribe Abdullah invited the sheikh and the most notable men to his tent, and entertained them sumptuously with camel's meat, afterwards talking long with them in private. Before many weeks had passed, the skilful men of the tribe, who knew the signs, were aware that many other

Bedouins were travelling in the same direction as themselves, though they could not be seen.

But neither Abdullah's men, nor Almasta herself, could know that in three months the sheikhs of all the tribes from Hasa to Harb, and from Ajman to El Kora, had heard that Khaled the Sultan was a Persian robber, and a Shiyah at heart, venerating Ali and execrating the true Sonna, a man who in all probability drank wine in secret, and who was certainly plotting to deliver up all Nejed to the power of the Ajjem. Some of them believed the tale readily enough, for all had asked whence Khaled was and none had got an answer. Could a man be of the desert, they asked, and yet not be known by name in any of the tribes, nor his father before him? Surely, there was a secret, they said, and he who will not tell the name of his father has a reason for changing his own. And as for his being brave and having fought well in the war with the Shammar, how could a man have been a robber if he were not brave, and why should he not fight manfully, since he had everything to gain and nothing to lose? As for the spoils, too, he had made a pretence of dividing them justly, but it was now well known that he had laden camels by stealth at Haïl, and had sent them secretly to Riad, slaughtering with his own hand all those who had helped him.

Little by little, too, the story came to Riad and was told in a low voice by merchants in the bazaar, and repeated by their wives among their acquaintance, and by the slaves in the market and among the beggars

who begged by the doors of the great mosque but were fed daily from the palace. And though many persons of the better sort thought that the story might be true, and wagged their heads when Khaled's name was spoken, yet the beggars with one accord declared that it was a lie. For Khaled was generous in alms-giving, and they said, "If Khaled is overthrown and another Sultan set up in his place, how do we know whether there will be boiled camel's meat from time to time as well as blanket-bread and a small measure of barley meal? And will the next Sultan scatter gold in the streets as Khaled did on the first day when he rode to the mosque? Truly these chatterers of Bedouins talk much of the treasure in the palace which will be divided, but they who talk most of gold, are they who most desire it, and we shall get none. Therefore we say it is a lie, and Khaled is a true man, and a Sonna like ourselves, not a swiller of wine nor a devourer of pigs. Allah show him mercy now and at the day of resurrection! The cock-sparrow is pluming his breast while the hunter is pulling the string of the snare."

Thus the beggars talked among themselves all day, reasoning after the manner of their kind. But they suffered other people to talk as they pleased, for one who desires alms must not exhibit a contradictory disposition, lest the rich man be offended and eat the melon together with the melon peels, and exclaim that the dirt-scraper has become a preacher. For the rich man's anger is at the edge of his nostrils and always ready.

As the winter passed away and the spring began, the tribes of the desert drew nearer and nearer to the city, as is their wont at that season. For many of the sheikhs had houses in the city, in which they spent the hot months of the year, while their people were encamped in the low hill country not far off, where the heat is less fierce than in the plains and the deserts. And now also the season of the Haj was approaching, for Ramadhan was not far off, and the beggars congregated at the gates waiting for the first pilgrims, and expecting plentiful alms, which in due time they received, for in that year Abdullah did not molest the Persian pilgrimage, his mind being occupied with other matters.

CHAPTER IX

THE story which was thus repeated from mouth to mouth in Riad reached the palace at the last, and the guards told it to each other as they sat together under the shadow of the great wall, the cooks related it among themselves in the kitchen, and the black slaves gossipped about it in the corners of the courtyard, and the women slaves stood and listened while they talked and carried the tale into the harem. But the people of the palace were more slow to believe than the people of the city, for they shared in a measure in Khaled's right of possession, and desired no change of master, so that for a long time neither Zehowah nor Khaled heard anything of what was commonly reported. Yet at last the old woman who had been Zehowah's nurse told her the substance of the story, with many protestations of unbelief and of anger against those who had invented the lie.

"It is right that my lady and mistress should know these things," she said, "and when our lord the Sultan has been informed of them, he will doubtless cause his soldiers to go forth with sticks and purify the hides of the chief evil-speakers in the bazaar. There is one especially, a merchant whose shop is opposite the door of the little mosque, who is continually bold in false-

hood, being the same who sold me this garment for linen; but it afterwards turned out to be cotton, and the gold threads are brass and have turned black. I pray Allah to be just as well as merciful."

At first Zehowah laughed, but soon afterwards her face became grave, and she bent her brows, for though the story was but a lie, she saw how easily it would find credence. She therefore sent the old woman away with a gift, and she herself went to Khaled, and sat down beside him and took his hand.

"You have secret enemies," she said, "who are plotting against your life, and who have already begun to attack you by filling the air of the city with falsehoods which fly from house to house like flies in summer entering at the window and going out by the door. You must sift this matter, for it is worthy of attention."

"And what are these lies of which you speak?"

"It is said openly in the city that you are a Shiyah and a Persian, having been a robber before you came here, and that you are plotting to deliver over Nejed to the Persians. Look to this, Khaled, for they say that you are no Bedouin, since no one knows your descent nor the name of your father."

"Do you believe this of me, Zehowah?" Khaled asked.

"Do I believe that the sun is black and the night as white as the sun? But it is true that I do not know your father's name."

Then Khaled was troubled, for he saw that it would be a hard matter to explain, and that without explana-

tion his safety might be endangered. Zehowah sat still beside him, holding his hand and looking into his face, as though expecting an answer.

"Have I done wisely in telling you?" she asked at last. "You are troubled. I should have said nothing."

"You have done wisely," he answered. "For I will go and speak to them, and if they believe me, the matter is finished, but if not I have lost nothing."

"It will be well to give the chief men presents, and to distribute something among the people, for gifts are great persuaders of unbelief."

"Shall I give them presents because they have believed evil of me?" asked Khaled, laughing. "Rather would I give you the treasures of the whole earth because you have not believed it."

"If I had the wealth of the whole world I would give it to them rather than that they should hurt a hair of your head," Zehowah answered.

"Am I more dear to you than so much gold, Zehowah?"

"What is gold that it should be weighed in the balance with the life of a man? You are dearer to me than gold."

"Is this love, Zehowah?" Khaled asked, in a low voice.

"I do not know whether it be love or not."

"The wing of night is lifted for a moment, and the false dawn is seen, and afterwards it is night again. But the true dawn will come by and by, when night folds her wings before the day."

"You speak in a riddle, Khaled."

"It is no matter. I will neither make a speech to the people, nor give them gifts. What is it to me? Let them chatter from the first call to prayer until the lights are put out in the evening. My fate is about my neck, and I cannot change it, any more than I can make you love me. Allah is great. I will wait and see what happens."

"Everything is undoubtedly in Allah's hand," said Zehowah. "But if a man, having meat set before him, will not raise his right hand to thrust it into the dish, he will die of hunger."

"And do you think that Allah does not know before whether the man will stretch out his hand or not?"

"Undoubtedly Allah knows. And he also knows that if you will not sift this matter and stop the mouths of the liars, I will, though I am but a woman, for otherwise we may both perish."

"If they destroy me, yet they cannot take the kingdom from you, nor hurt you," said Khaled. "How then are you in danger? If I am slain you will then choose a husband, whose father's name is known to them. They will be satisfied and you will be no worse off than before and possibly better. This is truth. I will therefore wait for the end."

"Who has put these words into your mouth, Khaled? For the thought is not in your heart. Moreover, if the tribes should rise up and overflow you, they would not spare me, for I would fight against them with my hands and they would kill me."

"Why should you fight for me, since you do not love me? But this is folly. No one ever heard of a woman taking arms and fighting."

"I have heard of such deeds. And if I had not heard of them, others should through me, for I would be the first to do them."

"I think that so long as Khaled lives, Zehowah need not bear arms," said Khaled. "I will therefore go and call the chief men together and speak to them."

And so he did. When the principal officers who had remained in the city during the winter season were assembled in the kahwah, and had hung up their swords on the pegs and partaken of a refreshment, Khaled sent the slaves away, and spoke in a few words as was his manner.

"Men of Riad, Aared and all Nejed," he said, "I regret that more of you are not present here, but a great number of sheikhs are still in the desert, and it cannot be helped. I desire to tell you that I have heard of a tale concerning me which is circulated from mouth to ear throughout Riad and the whole kingdom. This tale is untrue, a lie such as no honest man repeats even to his own wife at home in the harem. For it is said that I am not called Khaled, but perhaps Ali Hassan, or perhaps Ali Hussein, that I am a Shiyah, a wine-bibber and an idolatrous one who prays for the intercession of Ali, besides being a Persian and a robber. It is also said that I plot to deliver over the kingdom of Nejed to the Persians, though how this

could be done I do not know, seeing that the Persians are a meal-faced people of white jackals who do not know how to ride a camel. These are all lies. I swear by Allah."

When the men heard these words, they looked stealthily one at another, to see who would answer Khaled, for they had all heard the story and most of them were inclined to believe it. Peace is the mother of evil-speaking, as garbage breeds flies in a corner, which afterwards fly into clean houses and men ask whence they come. But none of the chief men found anything to say at first, so that Khaled sat in silence a long time, waiting for some one to speak. He therefore turned to the one nearest to him, and addressed him.

"Have you heard this tale?" he inquired. "And if you have heard it do you believe it?"

"I think, indeed, that I have heard something of the kind," answered the man. "But it was as the chattering of an uncertain vision in a dream, which rings in the ears for a moment while it is yet dark in the morning, but is forgotten when the sun rises. By the instrumentality of a just mind Allah caused that which entered at one ear to run out from the other as the rinsing of a water-skin."

"Good," answered Khaled. "Yet it is not well to rinse the brains with falsehoods. And you?" he inquired, turning to the next. "Have you heard it also?"

"Just lord, I have heard," replied this one. "But

if I have believed, may my head be shaved with a red-hot razor having a jagged edge."

"This is well," Khaled said, and he questioned a third.

"O Khaled!" cried the man. "Is the milk sour, because the slave has imagined a lie saying, 'I will say it is bad and then it will be given to me to drink'? Or is honey bitter because the cook has put salt in the sweetmeats? Or is it night because the woman has shut the door and the window, to keep out the sun?"

The next also found an answer, having collected his thoughts while the others were speaking.

"A certain man," said he, "kept sheep in Tabal Shammar, and the dog was with the sheep in the fold. Then two foxes came to the fold in the evening and one of them said to the man: 'All dogs are wolves, for we have seen their like in the mountains, and your dog is also a wolf and will eat up your sheep. Make haste to kill him therefore and cast out his carcass.' And to the sheep the other fox said: 'How many sheep hang by the heels at the butcher's! And how many dogs live in sheepfolds! This is an evil world for innocent people.' And the sheep were at first persuaded, but presently the dog ran out and caught one of the foxes and broke his neck, and the man threw a stone at the other and hit him, so that he also died. Then the sheep said one to another: 'The foxes have suffered justly, for they were liars and robbers and the dog and our master have protected us against them, which they would not have done had they desired our destruction.'

And so are the people, O Khaled. For if you let the liars go unhurt the people will believe them, but if you destroy them the faith of the multitude will be turned again to you."

"This is a fable," said Khaled, "and it is not without truth. I am the sheep-dog and the people are the sheep. But in the name of Allah, which are the foxes?"

Then he turned to another, an old man who was the Kadi, celebrated for his wisdom and for his religious teaching in the chief mosque.

"I ask you last of all," said Khaled, "because you are the wisest, and when the wisest words are heard last they are most easily remembered. For we first put water into the lamp, and then oil to float upon the surface, and next the wick, and last of all we take a torch and light the lamp and the darkness disappears. Light our lamp, therefore, O Kadi, and let us see clearly."

"O Khaled," replied the Kadi, "I am old and have seen the world. You cannot destroy the tree by cutting off one or two of its branches. It is necessary to strike at the root. Now the root of this tree of lies which has grown up is this. Neither we nor the people know whence you are, nor what was your father's name, and though I for my part do not impiously ask whence Allah takes the good gifts which he gives to men, there are many who are not satisfied, and who will go about in jealousy to make trouble until their questioning is answered. If you ask counsel of me, I say, tell

us here present of what tribe you are, for we believe you a pure Bedouin like the best of us, and tell us your father's name, and peace be upon him. We are men in authority and will speak to the people, and I will address them from the pulpit of the great mosque, and they will believe us. Then all will be ended, and the lies will be extinguished as the coals of an evening fire go out when the night frost descends upon the camp in winter. But if you will not tell us, yet I, for one, do not believe ill of you; and moreover you are lord, and we are vassals, so long as you are King and hold good and evil in your hand."

"So long as I am King," Khaled repeated. "And you think that if I do not tell my father's name, I shall not be where I am for a long time."

"Allah is wise, and knows," answered the Kadi, but he would say nothing more.

"This is plain speaking," said Khaled, "such as I like. But I might plainly take advantage of it. You desire to know my father's name and whence I come. Then is it not easy for me to say that I come from a distant part of the Great Dahna? Is there a man in Nejed who has crossed the Red Desert? And if I say that my father was Mohammed ibn Abd el Hamid ibn Abd el Latif, and so on to our father Ismaïl, upon whom be peace, shall any one deny that I speak truth? This is a very easy matter."

"So much the more will it be easy for us to satisfy the people," answered the Kadi.

"No doubt. I will think of what you have said.

And now, I pray you, partake of another refreshment and go in peace."

At this all the chief men looked one at the other again, for they saw that Khaled would not tell them what they wished to know. And those of them who had doubted the story before now began to believe it. But they held their peace, and presently made their salutation and took their swords from the wall and departed.

Khaled then left the kahwah and returned to Zehowah in the harem.

"I have told them that these tales are lies," he said, "but they do not believe me."

He repeated to Zehowah all that had been said, and she listened attentively, for she began to understand that there was danger not far off.

"And I told them," he said at last, "that it would be as easy for me to invent names, as for them to hear them. Then they looked sideways each at the other and kept silent."

"This is a foolish thing which you have done," answered Zehowah. "They will now all believe that your father was an evildoer and that you yourself are no better. Otherwise, they will say, why should he wish to conceal anything? You should have told them the truth, whatever it is."

"You also wish to know it, I see," said Khaled, looking at Zehowah curiously. "But if I were to tell you, you would not believe me, I think, any more than they would."

Then Zehowah looked at him in her turn, but he could not understand the language of her eyes.

"What is this secret of yours?" she asked. "I would indeed like to hear it, and if you swear to me that it is true, by Allah, I will believe you. For you are a very truthful man, and not subtle."

But Khaled was troubled at this. For he knew that she would find it hard to believe; and that if she did believe it, she would be terrified to think that she had married one of the genii, and if not, she would suspect him of a hidden purpose in telling her an empty fable, and he would then be further from her love than before. He held his peace, therefore, for some time, while she watched him, playing with her beads. In reality she was very curious to know the truth, though she had always been unwilling to ask it of him, seeing that she had married him as a stranger, of her own will and choice, without inquiry.

"Is it just," she asked at last, "that the people should accuse you of evil deeds and fill the air of the city with falsehoods concerning you, so that the very slaves hear the guards repeating the lies to each other in the courtyard, and that I, who am your wife, should not know the truth? What have I done that you should not trust me? Or what have I said that you should regard me no more than a slave who sprinkles the floor and makes the fire, and while she is present in the room you hold your peace lest she should know your thoughts and betray them? Am I not your wife, and faithful? Have I not given you a kingdom and

treasure beyond counting? Surely there were times when you talked more freely with that barbarian slave-woman, whose hair was red, than you ever talk with me."

"This is not true," said Khaled. "And if I talked familiarly with Almasta, you know the reason, for you yourself found it out, and called me simple for trying to deceive you. And now she is gone to the desert with her husband and there is no more question of her, or her red hair. But all the rest is true, and you have indeed given me a kingdom, which I am likely to lose and wealth which I do not desire, though you have not given me that which I covet more than gold or kingdoms, for I desire it indeed, and that is your love. Moreover if you have given me the rest, I have done something in return, for I have fought for your people, and shed my blood freely, and given you a nation captive, besides loving you and refusing to take another wife into my house. And this last is a matter of which some women would think more highly than you."

But Zehowah's curiosity was burning within her like a thirst, for although she had at first cared little to know of Khaled's former life, she was astonished at his persistency in keeping the secret now, seeing that the whole country was full of false rumours about him.

"How can a man expect that a woman should love him, if he will not put his trust in her?" she asked.

Then Khaled did not hesitate any longer, for he was never slow to do anything by which there seemed to be any hope of gaining her love. He therefore took her

hand in his, and it trembled a little so that he was pleased, though indeed the unsteadiness came more from her anxiety to know the story he was about to tell, than from any love she felt at that moment.

"You have sworn that you will believe me, Zehowah," he said. "But I forewarn you that there are hard things to understand. For the reason why I will not tell my father's name, nor the name of my tribe is a plain one, seeing that I was not born like other men, and have no father at all, and my brethren are not men but genii of the air, created from the beginning and destined to die at the second blast of the trumpet before the resurrection of the dead."

At this Zehowah started suddenly in fright and looked into his face, expecting to see that he had coals of fire for eyes and an appalling countenance. But when she saw that he was not changed and had the face of a man and the eyes of a man, she laughed.

"What is this idle tale of Afrits?" she exclaimed. "Frighten children with it."

"This is what I foresaw in you," said Khaled. "You cannot believe me. Of what use is it then to tell you my story?"

Zehowah answered nothing, for she was angry, supposing that Khaled was attempting to put her off with a foolish tale. She had heard, indeed, of Genii and Afrits and she was sure that they had existence, since they were expressly mentioned in the Koran, but she had never heard that any of them had taken the shape and manner of a man. She remembered also how

Khaled had always fought with his hands in war, like other men and been wounded, and she was sure that if his story were true he would have summoned whole legions of his fellows through the air to destroy the enemy.

"You do not believe me," he repeated somewhat bitterly. "And if you do not believe me, how shall others do so?"

"You ask me to believe too much. If you ask for my faith, you must offer me truths and not fables. It is true that I am curious, which is foolish and womanly. But if you do not wish to tell me your secret, I cannot force you to do so, nor have I any right to expect confidence. Let us therefore talk of other things, or else not talk at all, for though you will not satisfy me you cannot deceive me in this way."

"So you also believe that I am a Persian and a robber," said Khaled. "Is it not so?"

"How can I tell what you are, if you will not tell me? Is your name written in your face that I may know it is indeed Khaled and not Ali Hassan as the people say? Or is the record of your deeds inscribed upon your forehead for me to read? You may be a Persian. I cannot tell."

Then Khaled bent his brows and turned his eyes away from her, for he was angry and disappointed, though indeed she knew in her heart that he was no Persian. But she let him suppose that she thought so, hoping perhaps to goad him into satisfying her curiosity.

If Khaled had been a man like other men, as Zehowah supposed him to be, he would doubtless have invented a well-framed history such as she would have believed, at least for the present. But to him such a falsehood appeared useless, for he had seen the world during many ages and had observed that a lie is never really successful except by chance, seeing that no intelligence is profound enough to foresee the manner in which it will be some day examined, whereas the truth, being always coincident with the reality, can never be wholly refuted.

Khaled therefore hesitated as to whether he should tell his story from the beginning, or hold his peace; but in the end he decided to speak, because it was intolerable to him to be thought an evildoer by her.

"You make haste to disbelieve, before you have heard all," he said at last. "Hear me to the end. I have told you that I slew the Indian prince. That was before I became a man. You yourself could not understand how I was able to enter the palace and carry him away without being observed. But as I was at that time able to fly and to make both myself and him invisible, this need not surprise you. If you do not believe that I did it, let us order a litter to be brought for you, and I will take my mare and a sufficient number of attendants, and let us ride southwards into the Red Desert. There I will show you the man's bones. You will probably recognize them by the gold chain which he wore about his neck and by his ring. After that, when I had buried him, the mes-

senger of Allah came to me, and because the man was an unbeliever, and had intended to embrace the faith outwardly, having evil in his heart, Allah did not destroy me immediately, but commanded that the angel Asrael should write my name in the book of life, that I might become a man. But Allah gave me no soul, promising only that if I could win your love, whose suitor I had killed, I should receive an immortal spirit, which should then be judged according to my deeds. This is truth. I swear it in the name of Allah, the merciful, the compassionate. Then an angel gave me garments such as men wear, and a sword, and a good mare, and I travelled hither to Riad, eating locusts for food. And though no man knew me, you married me at once, for it was the will of Allah, whose will shall also be done to the end. The rest you know. If, therefore, you will love me before I die, I shall receive a soul and it may be that I shall inherit paradise, for I am a true believer and have shed blood for the faith. But if you do not love me, when I die I shall perish as the flame of a lamp that is blown out at dawn. This is the truth."

He ceased from speaking and looked again at Zehowah. At first he supposed from her face that she believed him, and his heart was comforted, but presently she smiled, and he understood that she was not convinced. For the story had interested her greatly and she had almost forgotten not to believe it, but when she no longer heard his voice, it seemed too hard for her.

"This is a strange tale," she said, "and it will probably not satisfy the people."

"I do not care whether they are satisfied or not," Khaled answered. "All I desire is to be believed by you, for I cannot bear that you should think me what I am not."

"What can I do? I cannot say to my intelligence, take this and reject that, any more than I can say to my heart, love or love not. It would indeed have been easier if you had said, 'I am a certain Persian, a fugitive, protect me, for my enemies are upon me.' I could perhaps give you protection if you require it, as you may. But you come to me with a monstrous tale, and you ask me to love, not a man, but a Jinn or an Afrit, or whatever it pleases you to call yourself. Assuredly this is too hard for me."

And again Zehowah smiled scornfully, for she was really beginning to think that he might be a Persian disguised as the people said.

"I need no protection from man or woman," said Khaled, "for I fear neither the one nor the other. For I am strong, and if I am able to give out of charity I am also able to take by force. My fate is ever with me. I cannot escape it. But neither can others escape theirs. I will fight alone if need be, for if you will not love me I care little how I may end. Moreover, in battle, it is not good to stand in the way of a man who seeks death."

But Zehowah thought this might be the speech of a desperate man such as Ali Hassan, the robber, as

well as of Khaled, the Jinn, and she was not convinced. though she no longer smiled. For she knew little of supernatural beings, and a devil might easily call himself a good spirit, so that she was convinced that she was married either to a demon or to a dangerous robber, and she could not even decide which of the two she would have preferred, for either was bad enough, and as for love there could no longer be any question of that.

Khaled understood well enough and rose from his seat and went away, desiring to be alone. He knew that he was now surrounded by danger on every side and that he could not even look to his wife for comfort, since she also believed him to be an impostor.

"Truly," he said to himself, "this is a task beyond accomplishment, which Allah has laid upon me. It is harder to get a woman's love than to win kingdoms, and it is easier to destroy a whole army with one stroke of a sword than to make a woman believe that which she does not desire. And now the end is at hand. For she will never love me and I shall certainly perish in this fight, being alone against so many. Allah assuredly did not intend me to run away, and moreover there is no reason left for remaining alive."

On that day Khaled again called the chief men together in his kahwah, and addressed them briefly.

"Men of Riad," he said, "I am aware that there is a conspiracy to overthrow and destroy me, and I daresay that you yourselves are among the plotters.

I will not tell you who I am, but I swear by Allah that I am neither a Persian nor a robber, nor yet a Shiyah. You will doubtless attack me unawares, but you will not find me sleeping. I will kill as many of you as I can, and afterwards I also shall undoubtedly be killed, for I am alone and you have many thousands on your side. Min Allah — it is in Allah's hands. Go in peace."

So they departed, shaking their heads, but saying nothing.

CHAPTER X

The Sheikh of the beggars was an old man, blind from his childhood, but otherwise strong and full of health, delighting in quarrels and swift to handle his staff. He had at first become a beggar, being still a young man, for his father and mother had died without making provision for him, and he had no brothers. As he boasted that he was of the pure blood of the desert on both sides, the other beggars jeered at him in the beginning, calling him Ibn el Sheikh in derision and sometimes stealing his food from him. But he beat them mightily, the just and the unjust together, since he could not see, and acquired great consideration amongst them, after which he behaved generously, giving his share with the rest for the common good, and something more. His companions learned also that his story was true and that his blood was as good as any from Ajman To El Kara, for a Bedouin of the same tribe as Abdullah, the husband of Almasta, came to see him not less than once every year, and called him brother and filled his sack with barley. This Bedouin was a person of consideration, also, as the beggars saw from his having a mare of his own, provided with a good saddle, and from his weapons. In the course of time therefore the blind

man grew great in the eyes of his fellows, until they called him Sheikh respectfully, and waited on him when he performed his ablutions, and he obtained over them a supremacy as great as was Khaled's over the kingdom he governed. He was very wise also, acquainted with the interpretation of dreams, and able to recite various chapters of the Koran. It was even said that he was able to distinguish a good man from a bad by the sound of his tread, though some thought that he only heard the jingling of coins in the girdle, and judged by this, having a finer hearing than other men. At all events he was often aware that a person able to give alms was approaching, while his companions were talking among themselves and noticed nothing, though they had eyes to see, being mostly only cripples and lepers.

On a certain day in the spring, when the sun was beginning to be hot and not long after Khaled had told Zehowah his story, many of the beggars were sitting in the eastern gate, by which the great road issues out of the city towards Hasa. They expected the coming of the first pilgrims every day, for the season was advancing. And now they sat talking together of the good prospects before them, and rejoicing that the winter was over so that they would not suffer any more from the cold.

"There is a horseman on the road," said the Sheikh of the beggars, interrupting the conversation. "O you to whom Allah has preserved the light of day, look forth and tell me who the rider is."

"It is undoubtedly a pilgrim," answered a young beggar, who was a stranger but had found his way to Riad without legs, no man knew how.

"Ass of Egypt," replied the Sheikh, reprovingly, "do pilgrims ride at a full gallop upon steeds of pure blood? But though your eyes are open your ears are deaf with the sleep of stupidity from which there is no awakening. That is a good horse, ridden by a light rider. Truly a man must itch to be called Haji who gallops thus on the road to Mecca."

Then the others looked, and at last one of them spoke, a hunchback having but one eye, but that one was keen.

"O Sheikh," he said, "rejoice and praise Allah, for I think it is he whom you call your brother, who comes in from the desert to visit you."

"If that is the case, I will indeed give thanks," answered the blind man, "for there is little in my barley-sack, less in my wallet and nothing at all in my stomach. Allah is gracious and compassionate!"

The hunchback's eye had not deceived him, and before long the Bedouin dismounted at the gate and looked about until he saw the Sheikh of the beggars, who indeed had already risen to welcome him. When they had embraced, the Bedouin led the blind man along in the shadow of the eastern wall until they were so far from the rest that they might freely talk without being overheard. Then they sat down together, and the mare stood waiting before them.

"O my brother," the Bedouin began, "was not my

mother the adopted daughter of your uncle, upon whom be peace? And have I not called you brother and filled your barley-sack from time to time these many years?"

"This is true," answered the Sheikh of the beggars. "Allah will requite you with seventy thousand days of unspeakable bliss for every grain of barley you have caused to pass my teeth. 'Be constant in prayer and in giving alms,' says the holy book, 'and you shall find with Allah all the good which you have sent before you, for your souls.' And it is also said, 'Give alms to your kindred, and to the poor and to orphans.' I am also grateful for all you have done, and my gratitude grows as a palm tree in the garden of my soul which is irrigated by your charity."

"It is well, my brother, it is well. I know the uprightness of your heart, and I have not ridden hither from the desert to count the treasure which may be in store for me in paradise. Allah knows the good, as well as the evil. I have come for another purpose. But tell me first, what is the news in the city? Are there no strange rumours afloat of late concerning Khaled the Sultan?"

"In each man's soul there are two wells," said the blind man. "The one is the spring of truth, the other is the fountain of lies."

"You are wise and full of years," said the Bedouin, "and I understand your caution, for I also am not very young. But here we must speak plainly, for the time is short in which to act. A sand-storm has darkened the eyes of the men of the desert and they

are saying that Khaled is a Shiyah, a Persian and a robber, and that he must be overthrown and a man of our own people made king in his stead."

"I have indeed heard such a rumour."

"It is more than a rumour. The tribes are even now assembling towards Riad, and before many days are past the end will come. Abdullah is the chief mover in this. But with your help, my brother, we will make his plotting empty and his scheming fruitless as a twig of ghada stuck into the sand, which will neither strike root nor bear leaves."

When the Sheikh of the beggars heard that he was expected to give help in frustrating Abdullah's plans he was troubled and much astonished.

"Shall the blind sheep go out and fight the lion?" he inquired tremulously.

"Even so," replied the Bedouin, unmoved, "and, moreover, without danger to himself. Hear me first. Abdullah and his tribe will encamp in the low hills, in a few days, as usual, but somewhat earlier than in other years, and a great number of other Bedouins will be in the neighbouring valleys at the same time. Then Abdullah will come into the city openly and go to his house with his wife and slaves, and during several days he will receive the visits of his friends and return them, and go to the palace and salute Khaled, as though nothing were about to happen. But in the meantime he will make everything ready, for it is his intention to go into the palace at night, disguised in a woman's garment, with his wife, and they will slay

Khaled in his sleep, and bind Zehowah, and distribute much treasure among the guards and slaves, and before morning the city will be full of Bedouins all ready to proclaim Abdullah Sultan. And you alone can prevent all this."

But the blind man laughed in his beard.

"This is a good jest!" he cried. "You have sought out a valiant warrior to stand between the Sultan and death! I am blind and old, and a beggar, and you would have me stand in the path of Abdullah and a thousand armed men. They would certainly laugh, as I do. Let me take with me a few lepers and the Egyptian jackass without legs, who has flown among us lately like a locust out of the clear air. Verily, their strength shall avail against the lances of the desert."

"This is no jest, my brother," answered the Bedouin, gravely. "Neither I, nor a hundred armed horsemen with me, could do what you will do unhurt. But I will save Khaled. For in the battle of the pass before we came to Haïl last summer when I had an arrow in my right arm and a spear thrust in my side, certain dogs of Shammars encompassed me, and darkness was already descending upon my eyes when Khaled rode in like a whirlwind of scythes, and sent four of them to hell, where they are now drinking molten brass like thirsty camels. Then I swore by Allah that I would defend him in the hour of need."

"Why do you not then lie in wait for Abdullah yourself and slay him as he passes you in the dark?"

"Is he not the sheikh of my tribe? How then can

I lay a hand on him? But I have thought of this during many nights in my tent, and you alone can do what is needed."

"Surely this is folly," said the Sheikh of the beggars. "You have met a hot wind in the desert and your mind is unsettled by it. I pray you come with me into the city to my dwelling, and take some refreshment, or at least let me send to the well for a drink of water."

"My head is cool and I am not thirsty, nor is the hot wind blowing at this time of year. Hear me. I will tell you how to save Khaled from destruction, and you shall receive more gold than you have dreamed of, and a house, and rich garments, and a young wife of a good family to comfort your old age. For the deed is easy and safe, but the reward will be great, and you alone can do the one and earn the other."

"I perceive," said the blind man, "that you are indeed in earnest, but I cannot understand what I can do. We know that Khaled is forewarned, for it is not many days since he summoned the chief men in Riad, with the Kadi, to the palace, and refused to tell them the name of his father, but said that if they attacked him he would kill as many of them as he could."

"I did not know this," answered the Bedouin. "But the knowledge does not change my plan. Now hear me. You are the Sheikh of all the beggars in Riad — may Allah send you long life and much gain — they are an army and you are a captain. Moreover the beggars are doubtless attached to Khaled by his generosity, and all of you say in your hearts that under

Abdullah there may be more sticks and less barley for you."

"This is true. But then, my brother, it is otherwise with you, for you are of Abdullah's tribe and will have honour and riches if he is made Sultan. How then is my advantage also yours?"

"And did not this Abdullah in the first place divorce with ignominy his second wife, who is my kinswoman, being the daughter of my father's sister? And has he restored the dowry as the law commands? Truly his new wife is even now sitting upon my cousin's carpet. And secondly Abdullah made himself sheikh unjustly, for our sheikh should be Abdul Kerim's son."

"Yet you accepted Abdullah and promised him allegiance."

"Does the camel say to his driver: 'I do not like to carry a load of barley, I would rather bear a basket of dates'? 'Eat what you please in your tent, but dress as other men,' says the proverb. Hear me, for I speak wisdom. Abdullah will come into the city and go to his house, intending to prepare the way for evil. And he will walk about the streets as usual, without attendants, both because he knows that the people are mostly with him, and also in order not to attract notice. Now Abdullah is the spring from which all this wickedness flows, he is the chief camel whom the others follow, the coal in the ashes by which the fire is kept alive, the head without which the body cannot live. Dry up the spring, therefore, let the chief camel fall into a pit suddenly, extinguish the coal, strike off the

head. Let them ask in the morning: 'Where is he?' And let him not be found anywhere. Then the people will be amazed and will not know what to do, having no leader. This is for you to do, and it can easily be done."

"What folly is this?" asked the blind man, shaking his head. "And how can I do what you wish?"

"It is very easy, for I know that you and your companions are as one man, living together for the common good. Go to the beggars therefore and tell them what I have told you, and be not afraid, for they will not betray you. And when Abdullah walks about the city alone lie in wait for him, for you will easily catch him in a narrow street, and two or three score of you can run after him begging for alms, until he is surrounded on all sides. Then fall upon him, and bind him, and take him secretly to one of your dwellings and keep him there, so that none find him, until the storm is past. In this way you will save Khaled and the kingdom, and when all is quiet you can deliver him up to be a laughing-stock at the palace and to all who believed in him. For there is nothing to fear, and I, for my part, am sure that Abdul Kerim's son will immediately be made sheikh of our tribe so that Abdullah will not return to us."

"You are subtle, my brother," said the Sheikh of the beggars, smiling and stroking his beard. "This is a good plan, being very simple, and Khaled will be grateful to us, and honour us beggars exceedingly. Said I not well that the jest was good? Surely it is better than I had thought, and more profitable."

"I have thought of it long in the nights of winter, both by the camp fire and in my tent and on the march. But I have told no one, nor will tell any one until all is done. But so soon as you have taken Abdullah and hidden him, let me know of it. To this end, when we are encamped outside the city I will come every evening to prayers in the great mosque and afterwards will wait for you near the door. As soon as I know that Abdullah is out of finding I will spread the report that he is lost, and before long all our tribe will give up the search, being indeed glad to get rid of him. And the rest is in the hand of Allah. I have done what I can, you must now do your share."

"By Allah! You shall not complain of me," answered the blind man, "nor of my people, for the jest is surpassingly good, and shall be well carried out."

"I will therefore go into the city, where I have business," said the Bedouin. "For I gave a reason for coming alone to Riad, and must needs show myself there to those who know me."

So the Bedouin filled the blind beggar's sack with barley and dates from his own supply and embraced him and went into the city, but the Sheikh of the beggars remained sitting in the same place for some time, at a distance from the rest, in an attitude of inward contemplation, though he was in reality listening to what the hunchback was telling the new cripple from Egypt. The Sheikh's ears were sharper than those of other men and he heard very clearly what was said.

"This Bedouin," said the hunchback, "is a near relation of our Sheikh, and holds him in great veneration, coming frequently to see him even from a considerable distance, and always bringing him a present of food. And you may see by his mare and by his weapons that he is a person of consideration in his tribe. For our Sheikh is not a negro, nor the son of a Syrian camel-driver, but an Arab of the best blood in the desert, and wise enough to sit in the council in the Sultan's palace. You, who are but lately arrived, being transported into our midst by the mercy of Allah, must learn all these things, and you will also find out that our Sheikh has eyes in his ears, and in his fingers and in his staff, though he is counted blind, and you cannot deceive him easily as you might suppose."

The Sheikh of the beggars was pleased when he heard this and listened attentively to hear the answer made by the Egyptian, whom he did not yet trust because he was a newcomer and a stranger.

"Truly," replied the cripple, "Allah has been merciful and compassionate to me, for he has brought me into the society of the wise and the good, which is better than much feasting in the company of the ignorant and the ill-mannered. And as for the Sheikh, he is evidently a very holy man, to whom eyes are not in any way necessary, his inward sight being constantly fixed upon heavenly things."

This answer did not altogether please the blind man, for it savoured somewhat of flattery. But the other

beggars approved of the speech, deeming that it showed a submissive spirit, and readiness to obey and respect their chief.

"O you of Egypt!" cried the Sheikh, calling to him. "Come here and sit beside me, for I have heard what you said and desire your company."

The cripple immediately began to crawl along by the wall, dragging himself upon his hands and body, for he had no legs.

"He is obedient," thought the blind man, "though it costs him much labour to move."

When the man was beside him, the Sheikh took an onion and a date from his wallet and set them down upon the ground.

"Eat," he said, "and give thanks."

The cripple thanked him and taking the food, began to eat the onion.

"You have taken the onion in your right hand and the date in your left," said the Sheikh. "And you are eating the onion first."

"This is true," answered the Egyptian. "I see that my lord has indeed eyes in his fingers."

"I have," said the Sheikh. "But that is not all, for this is an allegory. All men like to eat the onion first and the date afterwards, for though the onion be ever so sweet and tender, its taste is bitter when a man has eaten sugar-dates before it. But you have begun by giving us the mellow fruit of flattery, and when you give us the wholesome vegetable of truth it will be too sharp for our palates. Ponder this in your

heart, chew it as the camel does her cud, and the well-digested food of wisdom shall nourish your understanding."

The cripple listened in astonishment at the depth of the Sheikh's thought, and he would have spoken out his admiration, but it is not possible to eat an onion and to be eloquent at the same time. The blind man knew this and continued to give him instruction.

"The onion has saved you," he said, "for your mouth being full you could say nothing flattering, and now you will think before you speak. Consider how I have treated you. Have I at once rendered thanks to Allah for sending into our midst a young man whose gifts of eloquence are at least equal to those of the Kadi himself? I have said nothing so foolish. I have called you an ass of Egypt and otherwise rebuked you, for the good of your understanding, though I begin to think that you are indeed a very estimable young man, and it is possible that your wit may ripen in our society. But now I perceive by my hearing that you are eating the date. I pray you now, eat another onion after it."

"I cannot," answered the cripple, "for my lips are puckered at the thought of it."

"Neither is truth sweet after flattery," said the Sheikh, who then began to eat the other onion himself.

"I will endeavour to profit by your precepts, my lord," replied the Egyptian.

"Allah will then certainly enlighten you, my son. Remember also another thing. We are ourselves here a community, distinct from the citizens of Riad, and what we do, we do for the common good. Remember therefore to share what you receive with the rest, as they will share what they have with you, and take part with them in whatsoever is done by common consent. In this way it will be well with you and you shall grow fat; but if you are against us you will find evil in every man's hand, for since it has pleased Allah to give you no legs, you cannot possibly run away."

Having said this much the Sheikh of the beggars was silent. But afterwards on the same day he gathered about him the strongest of his companions, being mostly men who had the use of both arms and both legs, though some of them were lepers and some had but one eye, and some were deaf and dumb, according to the affliction which it had pleased Allah to send upon each. These were the most trusty and faithful of his people, and to them he communicated openly what the Bedouin had proposed to him in secret. All of them approved the plan, for they greatly feared the overthrow of Khaled.

"But," said one, "we cannot keep this Abdullah for ever, and we can surely not kill him, for we should bring upon ourselves a grievous punishment."

"Allah forbid that we should shed blood," replied the Sheikh. "But when Abdul Kerim's son is made sheikh of the tribe, Abdullah will probably not wish to go back to his people. Moreover it shall be for

Khaled to judge what shall be done to the man, and he will probably cut off his head. But in the meantime it is necessary to choose amongst us spies, two for each gate of the city, to the number of twenty-two men, to watch for Abdullah. For we do not know when he will come, and of the two spies who see him enter, both must follow him and see whither he goes, and then the one will immediately inform all the rest while the other waits for him. From the time he enters the city he will not be able to go anywhere without our knowledge, and we shall certainly catch him one day towards dusk in some narrow street of the city."

The beggars saw that this plan was wise and safe for themselves, and they did as the Sheikh advised, posting men at all the gates to wait for Abdullah. He was, indeed, not far distant, and before many days he rode into the city towards evening, attended by a few slaves and two Bedouins, his wife Almasta riding in the midst of them upon a camel. His face was not hidden and the two beggars who were watching recognised him immediately. They both followed him, until he entered his own house, and then the one sat down in the street to watch until he should come out, asking alms of those who accompanied him, until they also went in, with the beasts. But the other made haste to find the Sheikh and to inform him that Abdullah had come and was now in his own dwelling.

"It is well," said the blind man. "The cat is now asleep, and dreams of mice, but he shall wake in the midst of dogs. Abdullah will not leave his house

to-night, for it is late, and though he is not afraid in the day-time, he will not go out much at night, lest a secret messenger from Khaled, bearing evil in his hand, should meet him by the way. But to-morrow before dawn, some of us will wait in the neighbourhood of his house, and two or three score of others feigning to be all blind, as I am, must always be near at hand, watching us. We will then begin to importune him for alms, flattering him with fine language, as though we knew his plans. And this we will do continually, when he is abroad, until one day to escape from us he will turn quickly into a narrow street, supposing that we cannot see him. For he will not wish to be pursued by our cries in the bazaar lest he be obliged for shame to give something to each. Then those who can see will open their eyes and we will catch him in the lane, and bind rags over his head so that he cannot cry out, and lead him away to my dwelling by the Yemamah gate. And if any meet us by the way and inquire whom we are taking with us, we will say that he is one of ourselves, who is an epileptic and has fallen down in a fit, and that we are taking him to the farrier's by the gate, to be burned with red-hot irons for his recovery, as the physicians recommend in such cases. Surely we have now foreseen most things, but if we have forgotten anything, Allah will doubtless provide."

All the beggars in council approved this plan, for they saw that it could be easily carried out, if they could only catch Abdullah in a lonely street at the hour of prayer when few persons are passing.

But Abdullah himself was ignorant of the evil in store for him, and feared nothing, having been secretly informed that most of the better sort of people were ready to support him if he would strike the blow; for they suspected Khaled of being a traitor, especially since he had last addressed the chief men and refused to tell the name of his father. Abdullah therefore came and went openly in the city.

In the meantime, however, Khaled was informed of his presence and was warned of the danger. The aged Kadi came secretly by night to the palace and desired to be received by the Sultan in order to communicate to him news of great importance, as he said. Khaled immediately received him, and the Kadi proceeded to give a full account of Abdullah's designs; but the Sultan expressed no astonishment.

"Let him do what he will," he answered, "for I care little and, after all, what must be will be."

"But I beseech you to consider," said the Kadi, "that by acting promptly you could easily quell this revolution, in which I, by Allah, have no part and will have none. For though many persons may just now desire your overthrow, because they expect to get a share of the treasure in the confusion, yet few are disposed to accept such a man as Abdullah ibn Mohammed el Herir in your place. Even his own tribe are not all faithful to him, and I am credibly informed that many look upon him as an intruder, and would prefer the son of Abdul Kerim for sheikh, as would be just, if the rights of birth were considered. And it would be an

easy matter to remove this Abdullah. I implore you to think of the matter."

"Would this not be a murder?" asked Khaled, looking curiously at the venerable preacher.

"Allah is merciful and forgiving," replied the old man, looking down and stroking his beard. "And moreover, if you suffer Abdullah to go about a few days longer he will certainly destroy you, whereas it is an easy matter to give him a cup of such good drink as will save him from thirst ever afterwards, and you would obtain quiet and the kingdom would be at peace."

"They shall not find me sleeping," said Khaled, "and so that I may only slay a score of them first, I care not how soon I perish."

"This is indeed a new kind of madness!" exclaimed the Kadi. "I cannot understand it. But I have done what I could, and I can do nothing more."

"Nor is there anything more to be done," said Khaled. "But I thank you, for it is clear that you have spoken from a good intention."

So the Kadi went away again, and Khaled returned to Zehowah, caring not at all whether he lived or died. But Zehowah began to watch him narrowly.

"If this man were a Persian, an enemy and a traitor," she thought, "he would now begin to take measures for his own safety, seeing that he is threatened on every side. Yet he does not lift a hand to defend himself. This can proceed only from one of two causes. Either

he is a Jinn, as he has told me, and they cannot kill him, and so he does not fear them; or else he desires death, out of a sort of madness which has grown up in him through this love of which he is always speaking."

CHAPTER XI

In these days many of the Bedouin tribes came near the city and encamped in great numbers within half a day's journey and less. Abdullah was exceedingly busy with his preparations, and spent much time in talking with other sheikhs, hardly making any concealment of his movements or plans. For by this time it seemed clear to him that the greater part of the people were with him, and every one spoke of the coming overthrow of Khaled as an open matter. Khaled himself, too, was reported to be in fear of his life, and he was no longer seen in the streets as formerly, nor in the courts of the palace, nor even every day in the hall, but remained shut up in the harem, and none saw him except the women and a few slaves. Men said aloud that he was in great fear and distress, and as this story gained credence, so Abdullah's importance increased, since it was he who had brought such terror upon Khaled. All this was open talk in the bazaar, but Abdullah was himself somewhat suspicious, supposing that Khaled must have a plan in reserve for defending his possession of the throne. Abdullah, however, kept secret the manner in which he intended to enter the palace, though he promised his adherents to open to them the gates of

the castle, and the doors of the treasure chambers on a certain day, which he named, at the time of the first call to prayer in the morning, warning all those who were with him to come together in the great square before that hour in order to be ready to help him, if necessary, and to overwhelm the guards of the palace if they should make any resistance. But he did not know that the man of his tribe who was kinsman to the chief of the beggars had overheard his talk with his wife.

Meanwhile the beggars seemed to be multiplied exceedingly in Riad, for whenever Abdullah went out of his house they came upon him, sometimes by twos and threes and sometimes in scores, pressing close to him and begging alms. They also cried out a great deal, praising his generosity and praying for blessings upon him.

"Behold the sheikh of sheikhs!" they exclaimed. "He bears gold in his right hand and silver in his left. Yallah! Send him a long life and prosperity, for he loves the poor and his name is the Alms-giver. He is not El Herir but Er Rahman and his heart overflows with mercy as his purse does with small coins. Come, O brothers, and taste of his charity, which is a perpetual spring of good water beside a palm tree full of sugar-dates! Ya Abdullah, Servant of Allah, we love you! You are our father and mother. Your kefiyeh is the banner which goes before our pilgrimage. Come, O brothers, and taste of his charity."

Abdullah was not dissatisfied with these words, and

the beggars said much more to the same effect, which he regarded as signs of his popularity, so that he opened his purse from time to time and threw handfuls of money into the crowd, not counting the cost since he expected to be master of all the treasure in Riad within a few days. But the beggars were disappointed, for they had hoped that he would turn out to be avaricious, and endeavour to elude them by walking through narrow and lonely streets, where they might catch him. So they pressed more and more upon him every day, trying to exhaust his patience and his charity. In this however they failed, not understanding that the vanity of such a man is inexhaustible and knows no price. Abdullah, too, chose rather to be abroad during the daytime than in the evening or the early morning, for he desired to be seen by the multitude and spoken of as he went through the market-place. Yet on the last evening of all he fell into the hands of the Sheikh of the beggars, and evil befell him.

The hour of prayer was passed and it was almost the time when lights are extinguished. Then Abdullah took his sword under his aba, and also a good knife, which he had proved in battle, and which in his hand would pierce a coat of mail as though it were silk. Almasta, his wife, also made a bundle of woman's clothing and carried it in her arms. For they intended to go to a lonely place by the city wall, that Abdullah might there put on female garments, before entering the palace. He feared, indeed, lest if it were

afterwards known by what disguise he had accomplished his purpose, he might receive some name in derision, from which he should never escape so long as he lived. Yet he had no choice but to dress as a woman, since he could not otherwise by any means have gone into the harem.

As he came out of his house, accompanied only by Almasta, he was seen at once by the two beggars who were always on the watch. And then, wishing to warn their companions, of whom many were lying asleep upon doorsteps in the same street and in others close by, these two made haste to get up, pretending to be lame and making a great clatter with their staves, as they limped after Abdullah. Then he, who loved to exercise charity in the market-place, but not in the dark where none could applaud him, made a pretence of not seeing the poor men, and went swiftly on with Almasta running by his side. But as he walked fast, the two beggars although apparently lame increased their speed with his, and their clatter also.

"Does a sound man need a horse to escape from cripples?" asked Abdullah. And he turned quickly into a narrow lane.

"It will be wiser to scatter a few coins to them," said Almasta. "They will then stop and search for them in the dark. For these men are very importunate and will certainly hinder us."

But Abdullah was confident in his legs as a strong man and only walked the faster, so that Almasta could with great difficulty keep beside him. Then they

heard the beggars running after them in the dark and calling upon them.

"O Abdullah!" they cried. "The light of your charitable countenance goes before us like a lantern, and illuminates the whole street! Be merciful and give us a small coin, and Allah will reward you!"

Then Abdullah stopped in the darkest part of the narrow lane, seeing that they had recognised him, and conceiving that it would be a reproach for a sheikh of pure blood to run from beggars; and he feared also that it would be remembered against him on the morrow. He therefore made a pretence of being diverted, and laughed.

"Surely," he said, "the lame men of Riad could outrun in a race the sound men of any other city. And, by Allah, I have little money with me, for I was going to a friend's house to receive a sum due to me for certain mares; yet I will give you what I have, and, I pray you, go in peace."

Thereupon he sought in his wallet for something to give them, and while he was seeking they began to praise him after their manner.

"See this Abdullah!" they said. "He is the father of the poor and distressed, and is ever ready to divide all he has with us. Yallah! Bless him exceedingly! Yallah! Increase his family!"

But when Abdullah had found the money and was putting it into their hands, he was suddenly aware that instead of two beggars there were now ten or more, and these again multiplied in an extraordinary manner, so

that he felt himself hemmed in on every side in a close press.

"O Allah!" he exclaimed. "Thou art witness that unless these small coins are multiplied a hundredfold, as the basket of dates by the Prophet at the trench before Medina, I shall have nothing to give these worthy persons."

By this time the blind Sheikh of the beggars was present, and he pushed forward, pretending to rebuke his companions.

"O you greedy ones!" he cried. "How often have I told you not to be so importunate? Yet you crowd upon him like wasps upon a date, presuming upon the goodness of his heart, and when there is no more room you crowd upon each other. Forgive them, O Abdullah!" he said, addressing him directly, "for they have the appetites of jackals together with the understanding of little children. They would thrust into the dish a hand as small as a crow's foot and withdraw it looking as big as a camel's hoof. Their manners are also ——"

"My friend," said Abdullah, "I have given what I can. Let me therefore pass on, for my business is of importance, yet the throng is so great that I cannot move a step. To-morrow I will distribute much alms to you all."

"The radiance of your merciful countenance is enough for us," replied the Sheikh of the beggars, "and even I who am blind am comforted by its rays as by those of the sun in spring, and my hunger

is appeased by the honey of your incomparable eloquence ——"

"My friend," said Abdullah, interrupting him again, "I pray you to let me go forward now, for I have a very important matter in hand, though it is with difficulty that I tear myself away from your society, and I would willingly listen much longer to the words of the wise."

Then the blind man turned to the other beggars, and his hearing told him that by this time there were at least threescore in the street.

"Come, my brothers!" he cried. "Let us accompany our benefactor to the house of his friend, and afterwards we will wait for him and see that he reaches his own dwelling in safety. Surely it is not fitting that a sheikh of such great consideration should go about the streets at night without so much as an attendant carrying a lantern. Let us go with him."

Now these last words were the signal agreed upon, and even as Abdullah began to protest that he desired no such honourable escort as the beggars offered him, one came from behind and suddenly drew a thick barley-sack over his head, so that his voice was heard no more, and he was dragged down by the throat, while the one-eyed hunchback caught him by the legs and bound his feet and four others laid hold of his hands and tied them firmly behind him. Nor had Almasta time to utter a single cry before she was bound hand and foot with her head in a sack, like her husband. Then at a signal the beggars took up the

two as though they had been bales packed ready for a camel's back, and carried them away swiftly into the darkness, towards the eastern gate, where the blind man lived in a ruined house together with three or four of his most trusted companions. He also sent a messenger to his relation, the Bedouin, as had been agreed. It was already quite dark in the streets and the few persons who met the beggars did not see what they were carrying, nor ask questions of them, merely supposing that they had lingered long in the public square after evening prayers and were now returning in a body to their own quarter.

The blind man's house was built of three rooms and a wall, standing in a square around a small court. But only one of the rooms had a roof of its own, though there was a sort of cellar under the floor of one of the others which served at once as a lodging for beggars in winter, as a storehouse for food when there was any in supply and as a place of deposit for the ancient iron chest in which the common fund of money was kept. To this vault the Sheikh of the beggars made his companions bring the two prisoners, and having set them on the floor, side by side, he proceeded to hold a council, in which the captives themselves had no part, since their heads were tied up in dusty barley-sacks, and they could not speak so as to be heard.

"O my brothers!" said the blind man. "Allah has delivered the enemies of the kingdom into our hand, and it is necessary to decide what we will do with them. Let the oldest and the wisest give their opin-

ions first, and after them the others, even to the youngest, and last of all I will speak, and let us see whether we can agree."

"Let us kill the man and bury him, and then cast lots among us for the woman," said one.

"No," said the next, a man who had twice made the pilgrimage, and was much respected, "we cannot do this, for the man is a true believer, and evil will befall us if we shed his blood. Let us rather keep him here, and purify his hide every day with our staves, until Khaled is in no more danger, and then we will take him to the palace and deliver him up."

"It is to be feared," said the Sheikh of the beggars, "that the man might chance to die of this sort of purification, though indeed it be very wholesome for him, and I am not altogether against it."

"Let us make him our slave," said a third, who had himself been the slave of a poor man who had died without heirs. "The fellow is strong. Let us buy millstones and make him grind barley for us in this cellar. In this way he will not eat our food for nothing."

After this many others gave advice of the same kind. But while they were talking, there was a great clattering and noise upon the stone steps which led down into the cellar, and a man fell over the last step and rolled over and over into the very midst of the council, railing and lamenting.

"It is that ass of Egypt," said the Sheikh of the beggars. "I know him by the clattering of the wooden

hoofs he wears on his hands, and also by his braying. Let him also give his opinion when he is recovered from his fall."

"It is strange and marvellous," said one, "that he who has no legs should suffer so many falls, being, by the will of Allah, always upon the earth. For when we first saw him we found him fainting upon the ground, having fallen from the wall of a garden, though no man could tell how he had climbed upon it."

"I had been transported to the top of the wall as in a dream," replied the cripple, "for there were dates in that garden. But having eaten too greedily of them I fell asleep on the top and I dreamed that my body was torn by hyænas; and waking suddenly I fell down. For the dates were yet green."

"This may or may not be true," said the blind man. "For you are an Egyptian. Let us, however, hear what you have to advise in the matter of Abdullah and his wife, whom we have taken prisoners."

"I fear that you mock me, O my lord," answered the man. "But if I am mocked, I will advise that this Abdullah be also made a sport of, for us first, and for the people of Riad afterwards."

"Tell us how this may be done, for a good jest is better than salt for roasting, and the sheep lie here bound before us."

"Take this man, then," said the cripple, "and uncover his face, and hold him fast. Then let one of us get the razor and shave off all his beard and his eyebrows, and the hair of his head even to the nape of his

neck. Then if he came suddenly before her who bore him and cried, 'Mother,' she would cover her face and answer, 'Begone, thou ostrich's egg!' For she would not know him. And to-morrow we will take his excellent clothes from him and put them upon our Sheikh. But we will dress Abdullah in rags such as would not serve to wipe the mud from a slave's shoes in the time of the subsiding waters, and we will tie his hands under his arm-pits and put a halter over his head and lead him about the city. Then he will cry out against us to the people, saying that he is Abdullah, but we will also cry out in answer: 'See this madman, who believes himself to be a sheikh of Bedouins though Allah has given him no beard! O people of Riad, you may know that the spring is come, by the braying of this ass.'"

"Yet I see now that there may be wisdom in brayings," said the Sheikh of the beggars, "though Balaam ibn Beor shut his ears against it, and was punished for his cursing so that his tongue hung down to his breast, all his days, like that of a thirsty dog. This is good counsel, for in this way we shall not shed the man's blood, nor render ourselves guilty of his death; but I think we shall earn a great reward from Khaled, and his kingdom will be saved in laughter."

During all this time Abdullah had not moved, knowing that he was in the power of many enemies and beyond all reach of help, but when he heard the decision of the Sheikh of the beggars he was filled with shame and rolled himself from side to side upon the floor, as though trying to escape from the bonds

that held him. Almasta, for her part, lay quietly where they had put her, for she saw that all chance of success was gone and was pondering how she might take advantage of what happened, to save herself.

Then the beggars laid hold of Abdullah and held him, while others took the sack from his head. He was indeed half smothered with dust, so that at first he could not speak aloud, but coughed and sneezed like a dog that has thrust its nose into a dust-heap to find the bone which is hidden underneath. But presently he recovered his breath and began to rail at them and curse them. To this they paid no attention, but brought the oil lamp near him, and one began to rub soap upon his face and head while another got the razor with which the beggars shaved their heads and began to whet it upon his leathern girdle.

"Do not waste the precious stones of your eloquence upon a barber," said the Sheikh of the beggars, "but reserve your breath and the rich treasures of your speech until you are brought as a plucked bird before the people of Riad. Moreover we only wish to shave off your beard, but if you are restless some of your hide will certainly be removed also, whereby you will be hurt and it will be still harder for your friends to recognise you to-morrow. It is also useless to shout and scream as though you were driving camels, for you are in the cellar of my house, which is at a good distance from other habitations, on the borders of the city."

So Abdullah saw that there was no escape, and that his fate was about his neck, and he sat still as they had placed him, while the one-eyed hunchback shaved off his beard and the hair on his upper lip and his eyebrows, and the lock at the back of his head.

When this was done the blind man put out his hand and felt Abdullah's face.

"Surely," he said, "this is not a man's head, but the round end of a walking-staff, rubbed smooth by much use."

They also tied his hands under his arm-pits and put upon him a ragged shirt with sleeves so that he seemed to have lost both arms at the elbow.

"This is very well done," said the hunchback turning his head from side to side in order to see all with his one eye. "But what shall we do with the woman? Let us cast lots for her, and he who wins her shall marry her, and we will hold the feast immediately, for we have not yet supped and there is some of the camel's meat which we received to-day at the palace."

"O my brothers," answered the Sheikh of the beggars, "let us do nothing unlawful in our haste. For this woman is certainly one of Abdullah's wives, as you may see by her clothes, and unless he divorces her none of us can take her for ourselves, seeing that she is the wife of a believer. Take the sack from her head, however, and if she deafens us with her screaming we can put it on again. But you must by no means put her to shame by taking the veil from her face, for she may be an honest wife, though her

husband be a dog. If she has done well, we shall find it out, and no harm will have come to her; but if she is a sharer in this fellow's plans, her punishment will be grievous, since she will be the wife of an outcast, having neither beard nor eyebrows and rejected by all men."

Some of the beggars murmured at this, but most of them praised their Sheikh's wisdom, and would indeed have feared greatly to break the holy law, being chiefly devout men who prayed daily in the mosque and listened to the Khotbah on Friday. They therefore placed Almasta in one corner of the cellar and Abdullah in another, so that the two could not converse together, and then they took out such food as they had and began to eat their supper, laughing and talking over the jest and anticipating the reward which awaited them for saving Khaled.

In the meanwhile the night was advancing and many of Abdullah's friends left their houses secretly and gathered in the neighbourhood of the palace to wait for the first signal from within. By threes and by twos and singly they came out of their dwellings, looking to the right and left to see whether they were not the first, as men do who are not sure of being in the right. All had their swords with them, and some their bows also, and some few carried their spears, and they made no secret of their bearing weapons; but under each man's aba was concealed the largest barley-sack he could find in his house, and concerning this no one of the multitude said anything to his

neighbour, for each hoped to get a greater share than the others of the gold and precious stones from the fabulous treasure stored in the palace. Then most of these men sat down to wait, as vultures do before the camel is quite dead. But not long after the middle of the night they were joined by a great throng of Bedouins from Abdullah's tribe. These had been admitted into the city by the watchman according to the agreement, and passed up the great street from the Hasa gate, in a close body, not speaking and making but little noise with their feet as they walked; yet all of them together could be heard from a distance, because they were so many, and the sound was like the night wind among the branches of dry palm trees. After them, other Bedouins came in from camps both near and far, some of them having made half a day's journey since sunset; and they surrounded the palace on all sides, and filled the great street, and the street which passes by the mosque towards the Dereyiyah gate and all the other approaches to the open square, sitting down wherever there was room, or leaning against the closed shops of the bazaar, or standing up in a thick crowd when they were too closely pressed to be at ease. They talked together from time to time in low tones, but when their voices rose above a whisper some man in authority hushed them, saying that the hour was not yet come.

"By this time Abdullah has slain Khaled," said some, "and the daughter of the old Sultan is a prisoner."

"And by this time," said others, "Abdullah is surely unlocking the treasure chamber and filling a barley-sack with pearls and rubies. It is certain that he who slays the lion deserves his bride, but we hope that something will be left for us."

"Hush!" said the voice of one moving in the darkness. "Be patient. It is not yet time."

Then, for a space, a deep silence fell on the speakers and they crouched in their places watching the high black walls of the palace and marking the motion of the stars by the highest point of the tower. Before long whispered words were heard again.

"It would have been more just if Abdullah had opened the gate to us as soon as he had slain Khaled, for then we could have seen what he took. But now, who shall tell us what share of the riches he is hiding away in the more secret vaults?"

"This is true," answered others. "And besides, what need have we of Abdullah to help us into the palace? Surely we could have broken down the gates and slain the guards and Khaled himself without Abdullah's help. Yet we, for our part, would not shed the blood of a man who has always dealt very generously with us, nor do we believe the story of the camels laden secretly in Haïl. However, what is ordained will take place, and we shall undoubtedly receive plentiful gold merely for sitting here to watch the stars through the night."

"The story of the camels is not true," said a certain man, speaking alone. "For I was of the drivers

sent with them, and being hungry, we opened one of the bales on the way. By Allah! There was nothing but wheat in it, and it was white and good; but there was nothing else, not so much as a few small coins ——"

Then there was the sound of a blow, and the man who was speaking was struck on the mouth, so that his speech was interrupted.

"Peace and be silent!" said a voice. "They who speak lies will receive no share with the rest when the time comes."

But the man who had been struck was the strongest of all his tribe, though he who had struck him did not know it. And the man caught his assailant by the waist in the dark, and wrestled with him violently, being very angry, and broke his forearm and his collar-bone and several of his ribs, and when he had done with him, he threw him over his shoulder so that he fell fainting and moaning three paces away.

"O you who strike honest men on the mouth in the dark, you have been over-rash!" he cried. "Go home and hide yourself lest I recognise you and break such bones as you have still whole!"

"This is well done," said one of the bystanders, in a loud voice. "For the story of the camels laden secretly with treasure is a lie. I also was with the drivers and ate of the wheat. Nor do I believe that Khaled is a robber and a Persian."

"We do not believe it!" cried a score of Bedouins together. "And if we have come here, it is to get our

share like other men, since they tell us that Khaled is dead. But now we believe that Abdullah has shut himself into the palace and means to keep all for himself, and is cheating us."

These men were none of them of Abdullah's tribe, but as the voices grew louder, Abdullah's kinsmen came up, and endeavoured to quiet the growing tumult. The crowd had parted a little and the strong man stood alone in the midst.

"We pray you to be patient," said Abdullah's men, "for the time is at hand and the false dawn has already passed, though you have not seen it, so that before long it will be day. Then the gates will be opened and you shall all go in."

"We have no need of your sheikh to open gates for us," said the strong man, in a voice that could be heard very far through the crowd. "And moreover it will be better for you not to strike any more of us, or, by Allah, we will not only break your bones but shed your blood."

At this there was a sullen cry, and men sprang to their feet and laid their hands upon their weapons. But a youth who had come up with Abdullah's kinsmen, though not one of them, bent very low over the man who had been thrown down and then spoke out with a loud and laughing voice.

"Truly they say that crows lead people to the carcases of dogs!" he said. "This fellow is of the family which murdered my father, upon whom may Allah send peace! Nor will I exceed the bounds of moderation and justice."

Thereupon the young man drew out his knife and immediately killed his father's enemy as he lay upon the ground, and then he withdrew quickly into the dark crowd so that none knew him. But though there was only the light of the stars and the multitude was great, many had seen the deed and each man stood closer by his neighbour and grasped his weapon to be in readiness. The kinsmen of Abdullah saw that they were separated from their own tribe and drew back, warning the others to keep the peace and be silent, lest they should be cut off from their share of the spoil. But their voices trembled with fears for their own safety, and they were answered by scornful shouts and jeers.

"The young man says well that you are crows," cried the angry men, "for you wish to keep the carcase for yourselves. Come and take it if you are able!"

Now indeed the quarrel which had been begun by the blow struck in the dark spread suddenly to great dimensions, for the words spoken were caught up as grains of sand by the wind and blown into all men's ears. Many were ready enough to believe that Abdullah cared only for enriching himself and his tribe, and many more who had been persuaded to the enterprise by the hope of gain turned again to their faith in Khaled as the dream of gold disappeared from their eyes. Yet Abdullah's tribe was numerous, and it was easy to see that if the dissension grew into a strife of arms the fight would be long and fierce on both sides.

Then certain of those who were against Abdullah raised the cry that he had slain Khaled and escaped

with the treasure by a secret passage leading under the walls of the city, which passage was spoken of in old tales, though no one knew where to find it. But the multitude believed and pressed forward in a strong body and began to beat against the iron-bound gate of the palace with great stones and pieces of wood. Abdullah's men came on fiercely to prevent them, but were opposed by many, and as the wing of night was lifted and the dawn drank the stars, the wide square was filled with the clashing of arms and the noise of a terrible tumult.

CHAPTER XII

At the time when the beggars were carrying away Abdullah and his wife, Khaled was sitting in his accustomed place, silent and heavy at heart, and Zehowah played softly to him upon a barbat and sang a sad song in a low voice. For she saw that gloominess had overcome him and she feared to disturb his mood, though she would gladly have made him smile if she had been able.

A black slave of Khaled's whom he had treated with great kindness had secretly told him that there was a plan to enter the palace with evil during that night, for the fellow had spied upon those who knew and had overheard what he now told his master. He had also asked whether he should not warn the guards of the palace, in order that a strict watch should be kept, but Khaled had bidden him be silent.

"Either the guards are conspiring with the rest," said Khaled, "and will be the first to attack me, or they are ignorant of the plan; and if so how can they withstand so great a multitude? I will abide by my own fate, and no man shall lose his life for my sake unless he desires to do so."

But he privately put on a coat of mail under his aba, and when he sat down in the harem to await the end he

would not let Zehowah take his sword, but laid it upon his feet and sat upright against the wall, looking towards the door.

"Since I have no soul," he said to himself, "this is probably the end of all things. But there is no reason why I should not kill as many of these murderers as possible."

He was gloomy and desponding, however, since he saw that his hour was at hand, and that Zehowah was no nearer to loving him than before. He watched her fingers as she played upon the instrument, and he listened to the soft notes of her voice.

"It is a strange thing," he thought, "and I believe that she is not able to love, any more than my sword upon my feet, which is good and true and beautiful, and ever ready to my hand, but is itself cold, having no feeling in it."

Still Zehowah sang and Khaled heard her song, listening watchfully for a man's tread upon the threshold and looking to see a man's face and the light of steel in the shadow beyond the lamps.

"The night is long," he said at last, aloud.

"It is not yet midnight," Zehowah answered. "But you are tired. Will you not go to rest?"

"I shall rest to-morrow," said Khaled. "To-night I will sit here and look at you, if you will sing to me."

Zehowah gazed into his eyes, wondering a little at his exceeding sadness. Then she bowed her head and struck the strings of the instrument to a new measure

more melancholy than the last, and sang an old song of many verses, with a weeping refrain.

"Are you also heavy at heart to-night?" Khaled asked, when he had listened to the end.

"It is not easy to kindle a lamp when the rain is falling heavily," Zehowah said. "Your sadness has taken hold of me, like the chill of a fever. I cannot laugh to-night."

"And yet you have a good cause, for they say that to-night the earth is to be delivered of a great malefactor, a certain Persian, whose name is perhaps Hassan, a notorious robber."

Khaled turned away his head, smiling bitterly, for he desired not to see the satisfaction which would come into her face.

"This is a poor jest," she answered in a low voice, and the barbat rolled from her knees to the carpet beside her.

"I mean no jesting, for I do not desire to disappoint you, since you will naturally be glad to be freed from me. But I am glad if you are willing to sing to me, for this night is very long."

"Do you think that I believe this of you?" asked Zehowah, after some time.

"You believed it yesterday, you believe it to-day, and you will believe it to-morrow when you are free to make choice of some other man — whom you will doubtless love."

"Yet I know that it is not true," she said suddenly.

"It is too late," Khaled answered. "The more I

love you, the more I see how little faith you have in me — and the less faith can I put in you. Will you sing to me again?"

"This is very cruel and bitter." Zehowah sighed and looked at him.

"Will you sing to me again, Zehowah?" he repeated. "I like your sad music."

Then she took up the barbat from the carpet, but though she struck a chord she could not go on and her hand lay idle upon the strings, and her voice was still.

"You are perhaps tired," said Khaled, after some time. "Then lay aside the instrument and sleep." He composed himself in his seat, his sword being ready and his eyes towards the door.

But Zehowah shook her head as though awaking from a dream, her fingers ran swiftly over the strings and gentle tones came from her lips. Khaled listened thoughtfully to the song and the words soothed him, but before she had reached the end, she stopped suddenly.

"Why do you not finish it?" he asked.

"If you have told me truth," she answered, "this is no time for singing and music. But if not, why should I labour to amuse you, as though I were a slave? I will call one of the women who has a sweet voice and a good memory. She will sing you a kasid which will last till morning."

"You are wrong," said Khaled. "There is no reason in what you say."

But he reflected upon her nature, while he spoke.

"Surely," he thought, "there is nothing in the world so contradictory as a woman. I ask of her a song and she is silent. I bid her rest, supposing her to be weary, and she sings to me. If I tell her that I hate her she will perhaps answer that she loves me. Min Allah! Let us see."

"You inspire hatred in me," he said aloud, after a few moments.

At this Zehowah was very much astonished, and she again let the barbat fall from her knees.

"You wished me to believe that you loved me, and this not long since," she answered.

"It may be so. I did not know you then."

He looked towards the door as though he would say nothing further. Zehowah sighed, not understanding him, yet being wounded in that sensitive tissue of the heart which divides the outer desert of pride from the inner garden of love, belonging to neither but separating the two as a veil. And when there is a rent in that veil, pride looks on love and scoffs bitterly, and love looks on pride and weeps tears of fire.

"I am sorry that you hate me," she said, but the words were bitter in her mouth as a draught from a spring into which the enemy have cast wormwood, that none may drink of it.

"Allah is great!" thought Khaled. "This is already an advantage."

Then Zehowah took up the barbat and began to sing a careless song, not like any which Khaled had ever heard. This is the song —

"The fisherman of Oman tied the halter under his arms,
The sky was as blue as the sea in winter.
The fisherman dived into the deep waters
As a ray of light shoots through a sapphire of price.
The sea was as blue as the sky, for it was winter.
Among the rocks below the water it was dark and cold
Though the sky above was as blue as a fine sapphire.
The fisherman saw a rough shell lying there in the dark between two crabs,
'In that shell there must be a large pearl,' he said.
But when he would have taken it the crabs ran together and fastened upon his hand.
His heart was bursting in his ribs for lack of breath
And he thought of the sky above, as blue as the sea in winter.
So he pulled the halter and was taken half-fainting into the boat.
The crabs held his hand but he struck them off,
And his heart beat merrily as he breathed the wind
Blowing over the sea as blue as the sky in winter.
'There are no pearls in this ocean,' he said to his companions,
'But there are crabs if any one cares to dive.'
One of them saw the shell caught between the legs of the crabs,
He opened it and found a pearl of the value of a kingdom.
'The pearl is mine, but you may eat the crabs,' he said to the fisherman.
'Since you say there are no pearls in this ocean,
Which is as blue as the sky in winter.'
Then the fisherman smote him and tried to take the pearl,
But as they strove it fell into the deep water and sank.
Where the sea was as blue as the sky in winter.
'I will drown you with a heavy weight,' said the fisherman, 'for you have robbed me of my fortune.'
'I have not robbed you, O brother, for the pearl is again where you found it,
In the sea which is as blue as the sky in winter.'
Then the fisherman dived again many times in vain
Till the drums of his ears were broken and his heart was dissolved for lack of breath.
But the pearl is still there, at the bottom of the sea,

And the sea is as blue as the sky in winter.
This is the kasid of the fisherman of Oman
Which Zehowah Bint ul Mahomed el Hamid
Has made and sung for her lord, Khaled the Sultan.
May Allah send him long life and many such hearts
As the one which fell into the ocean
When the sky was as blue as the sea in winter."

"This is a new song," said Khaled, when she had finished.

"Is it? I made it many months ago," Zehowah answered. "Does it please you?"

"It is not very melodious, nor do I think there is much truth in the matter of it. But I thank you, for it has served to pass the time."

Zehowah laughed a little scornfully.

"I daresay you would prefer the song of a Persian nightingale," she said. "Nevertheless my song is full of truth, though you cannot see it. There are many who seek for things of great value and do not know when they have found them because a crab has bitten their hands."

"Verily," thought Khaled, "this is indeed the spirit of contradiction."

But he was silent for a time, not wishing that she should think him easily moved. In the meantime Zehowah played softly upon the little instrument and Khaled watched her, wondering whether she were not playing upon the strings of his heart, for her own pleasure, as skilfully as her fingers ran upon the chords of the barbat. Many words rose to his lips then, and he wished that he also had the science of music that

he might sing sweetly to her. Then he laughed aloud at his own imagination, which was indeed that of a foolish youth.

"The lion roaring for a sweetmeat," he thought, "and the sword-hand aching to scratch little tunes upon a lute!"

Zehowah turned suddenly when he laughed, and ceased from playing.

"I am glad that you are merry," she said. "I like laughter better than reproaches and prefer it to gloomy forebodings of evil when none is at hand."

Khaled's face grew dark, and he looked again towards the door.

"If you will stay with me, you shall see that evil is not far off," he answered, for she had reminded him of what he was expecting, and he knew that it was no jesting matter. "But you shall please yourself in this as in all other matters, though it were better for you to go now and shut yourself up in an inner room and wait for the end. The night is advancing, and all will soon be over."

"Hear me, Khaled," said Zehowah, speaking earnestly. "If you bid me go, I will go, or if you desire me to stay, I will remain with you. But if you are indeed in danger, as you say, let us call up the guards and the watchmen who sleep in the palace, that they may stand by you with their swords and help you to fight if there is to be strife."

"I will have no treacherous fellows about me," Khaled answered, "and there are none here whom I can

trust. My hour is coming and I will fight this fight alone. But if you were such as I once hoped, I would say: 'Remain with me, so long as you are safe.' Now, since Allah has willed it thus, I say to you: 'Go and seek safety where you can find it.' Go, therefore, Zehowah, and leave me alone, for I need no one beside me, and you least of all."

He turned away his head, lest she should see his face, and with his hand made a gesture bidding her to leave him. She rose from her seat softly and hung the barbat upon the wall with the other musical instruments, looking over her shoulder to see whether he would call her back. But he neither moved nor spoke, being resolved to venture all upon this trial, for he knew that if she loved him even but a little, she would not leave him alone in the extremity of danger.

Then she went towards the door of the room, turning her head to look at him as she passed near him.

"Farewell," she said. But he did not answer nor show that he heard her voice.

As she lifted the curtain to go out, she lingered and gazed at him. He sat motionless upon the carpet, upright against the wall, his sword lying across his feet, his hands hidden under his sleeves, looking towards her indeed but not seeming to see her.

"There can be no real danger," she thought. "Could any man sit thus, expecting death, and refusing to let any one stand by him to fight with him? Surely, he is playing with me, and setting a trap for me. But he shall not catch me."

She turned to go and the curtain was falling behind her when the night wind from the open passage brought a sound to her ears from a far distance. She started and listened, as camels do when they hear the first moving of the hot wind. There were no voices in the noise, which was low and dull, like the breathing of a great multitude and the soft moving of feet, and altogether it was as the slow rising and falling back of the sea upon the shores of Oman, when the great summer storm is coming from the south-west.

Zehowah stood still a moment and drank in every murmur that reached her from without. Then her face grew white and her lips trembled when she thought of Khaled sitting alone on the other side of the curtain, with his sword upon his feet, waiting for the end. She lifted the hanging a little and looked at him again. He saw her, but made no sign. Even as she looked, the distant murmur grew louder and she fancied that he moved his head as though he heard it. Then she entered the room and came and stood before him.

"There is a great multitude in the square before the palace," she said.

"I know it," he answered, calmly looking up to her face. "It needed not that you should tell me."

"Will you not let me stay with you now?" asked Zehowah.

"Why should you stay here?" he asked with a pretence of indifference. "Of what use are you to me? Take this sword. Can you strike with it? Your wrist is feeble. Or take a bow from the weapons on

the wall. Can you draw the string? Your strength is sufficient for the lute, and your skill for scratching the strings of the barbat. Go and save yourself. I am alone and every man's hand is against me."

Zehowah stood still in the room and hesitated, looking into his eyes for something which she all at once desired with a hot thirst. At last she spoke in an uncertain voice.

"Yet you said not long since that if I were such as you once hoped, you would bid me remain."

"I do not care," he answered. "Yet for your own sake, I advise you to go away."

"For my own sake!" she repeated, trying to speak scornfully, and turning to go a second time.

But she did not reach the door. She stood still before the weapons which hung upon the wall, and paused a moment and then took a sword from its place. Khaled watched her. She grasped the hilt as well as she could and swung the weapon in the air once with all her might. Then she uttered a little cry of pain. for she had twisted her wrist. The sword fell to the floor.

"He is right," she said in a low tone, speaking aloud to herself. "I am weak and can be of no use to him."

She went on once more towards the door, slowly, her head bent down, then stopped and then looked back again. She feared that she might see a smile on his face, but his eyes were grave and calm. Then he saw her turn and lean against the wall as though she were suddenly weak. She hid her face, and there was silence

for a moment, and after that a low sound of weeping filled the still room.

"Why do you shed tears?" Khaled asked presently. "There is no danger for you, I think. If you will go and shut yourself in the inner rooms you will be safe."

She turned fiercely and their eyes met.

"What do I care for myself?" she cried. "Among so many deaths there is surely one for me!"

Even as she spoke Khaled felt a cool breath upon his forehead, stirring the stillness. He knew that it came from the beating of an angel's wings. All his body trembled, his head fell forward a little and his eyes closed.

"This is death," he thought, "and my fate has come. A little longer, and she would have loved me." But he did not speak aloud.

Again Zehowah's face was turned toward the wall, and still the sound of her weeping filled the air, not subsiding and dying away, but rather increasing with every moment.

"Life is not yet gone," said Khaled in his heart. "There is yet hope." For he no longer felt the cold breath on his forehead, and the trembling had ceased for a moment.

He tried to speak aloud, but his lips could not form words nor his throat utter sounds, and he was amazed at his weakness. A great despair came upon him and his eyes were darkened so that he could not see the lights.

"If only I could speak to her now, she might love me yet!" he thought.

The distant murmur from without was louder now and reached the room, and he heard it. He tried with all his might to raise his hand, to lift his head, to speak a single word.

"It may be that this is the nature of death," he thought again, "and I am already dead."

The noise from the multitude came louder and louder. Zehowah heard it and her breath was caught in her throat. She looked up and saw that the high window of the chamber was no longer quite dark. The day was dawning. Then pressing her bosom with her hands she looked again at Khaled. His head was bent upon his breast and he was so still that she thought he had fallen asleep. A cry broke from her lips.

"He cares not!" she exclaimed. "What is it to him, whether I go, or stay?"

Again Khaled felt the cool breeze in the room, fanning his forehead, and once more his limbs trembled. Then he felt that his strength was returning and that he could move. He raised his head and looked at Zehowah, and just then there was a distant crashing roar, as the Bedouins began to strike upon the gates.

"It is time," he said, and taking his sword in his hand he rose from his seat.

Zehowah came towards him with outstretched hands, wet cheeks, and burning eyes. She stood before him as though to bar the way, and hinder him from going out.

"What is it to you, whether I go, or stay?" he asked, repeating her own words.

"What is it? By Allah, it is all my life — I will not let you go!" And she took hold of his wrists with her weak woman's hands, and tried to thrust him back.

"Go, Zehowah," he answered, gently pressing her from him. "Go now, and let me meet them alone, knowing that you are safe. For though this be pity which you feel, I know it is nothing more."

He would have passed by her, but still she held him and kept before him.

"You shall not go!" she cried. "I will prevent you with my body. Pity, you say? Oh, Khaled! Is pity fierce? Is pity strong? Does pity burn like fire? You shall not go, I say!"

Then her hands grew cold upon his wrists, her cheeks burned and in her eyes there was a deep and gleaming light. All this Khaled felt and saw, while he heard the raging of the multitude without. His sight grew again uncertain. A third time the cool breath blew in his face.

"Yet it cannot be love," he said uncertainly. Yet she heard him.

"Not love? Khaled, Khaled — my life, my breath, my soul — breath of my life, life of my spirit — oh, Khaled, you have never loved as I love you now!"

Her hands let go his wrists and clasped about his neck, and her face was hidden upon his shoulder while her breath came and went like the gusts of the burning storm in summer.

But as he held her, Khaled looked up and saw that

the Angel of Allah was before him, having a smiling countenance and bearing in his hand a bright flame like the crescent moon.

"It is well done, O Khaled," said the Angel, "and this is thy reward. Allah sends thee this to be thy own and to live after thy body, saying that thou hast well earned it, for love such as thou hast got now is a rare thing, not common with women and least of all with wives of kings. And now Allah alone knows what thy fate is to be, but thou shalt be judged at the end like other men, according to thy deeds, be they good or evil. And so receive thy soul and do with it as thou wilt."

The Angel then held out the flame which was like the crescent moon and it immediately took shape and became the brighter image of Khaled himself, endowed with immortality, and the knowledge of its own good and evil. And when Khaled had looked at it fixedly for a moment, being overcome with joy, the vision of himself disappeared, and he was aware that it had entered his own body and taken up its life within him.

"Return thanks to Allah, and go thy way to the end," said the Angel, who then unfolded his wings and departed to paradise whence he had come.

But Khaled clasped Zehowah tightly in his arms, and looking upwards repeated the first chapter of the Koran and also the one hundred and tenth chapter, which is entitled Assistance. When he had performed these inward devotions he turned his gaze upon Zehowah and kissed her.

"Praise be to Allah," he said, "for this and all blessings. But now let us defend ourselves if we can, my beloved, for I think my enemies are at hand."

And so he would have stooped to take up his sword which had fallen upon the floor. But still Zehowah held him and would not let him go.

"Not yet, Khaled!" she cried. "Not yet, soul of my soul! The gates are very strong, and will withstand this battering for some time."

"Would you have him whom you love sit still in the net until the hunters come to catch him?" he asked in a tender voice.

"You said you would wait here," she pleaded. "If we must die, let us die here — our life will be a little longer so."

"Did I say so? I thought you did not love me then, and I would have slain a few only, for my own sake, that my blood might not be unavenged. But now I will slay them all, for your sake, and the bodies of the dead shall be a rampart for you."

"Oh, do not go!" she cried again. "I know a secret passage from the palace, that leads out by the wall of the city — come quickly, there is yet time, and we shall escape — for Allah will protect us. Surely, when I was fainting in your arms I heard an angel's voice — and surely the angel is yet with us, and will lighten the way as we go."

"The Angel was indeed here, for he brought me the soul that was promised, if you loved me. And

now all is changed, for if we live we get the victory, and if we die we shall inherit paradise."

And Zehowah looked into his eyes and saw the living soul flaming within, and she believed him.

"If you had always been as you are now, I should have always loved you," she said softly, and stooping down she took up his sword and drew it out and put it into his hand. "I tried to wield one when you were not looking," she said, "but it hurt my wrist. Come, Khaled — let us go together."

Then he kissed her once more, and she kissed him, and putting one arm about her, he led her swiftly out by the passage towards the great gate. It was now broad dawn and the light was coming in by the narrow windows.

Zehowah clung to Khaled closely, for the noise of the thundering blows was terrible and deafening, and the multitude without were shouting to each other and calling upon Abdullah to come out, for they supposed him to be in the palace. But the guards and soldiers within had all hidden themselves though they were awake, for there was no one to command them nor to lead them, and they dared not open the gate lest they themselves should be slain in the first rush of the crowd.

Then Khaled and Zehowah paused for a moment near the gate.

"It is better that you should go back, my beloved," said Khaled. "Hear what a multitude of angry men are waiting outside."

"I will not leave you — neither in life nor in death," she answered.

"Let it be so, then," said Khaled, "and I will do my best. For a hundred men could not stop the way before me now, and I think that of five hundred I could slay many."

So he went up to the gate, and Zehowah stood a little behind him so as to be free of the first sweep of his sword.

"Abdullah!" cried some of the crowd without, while battering at the iron-bound doors. "Abdullah, thou son of Mohammed and father of lies, come out to us, or we will go to thee!"

"Abdullah, thou thief, thou Persian, thou cheat, come out, and may boiling water be thy portion!"

"Stand back from the gate, and I will open it to you!" cried Khaled, in a voice that might have been heard across the Red Desert as far as the shores of the great ocean.

"I, Khaled, will open," he cried again.

Then there was a great silence and the people fell back a little.

Khaled drew the bolts and unfastened the locks, and opened the gates inward and stood forth alone in the morning light, his sword in his hand and his soul burning in his eyes.

"Khaled!" cried the first who saw him, and the cry was taken up.

The shout was great, and full of joy and shook the earth. For the multitude had grown hot in anger

against Abdullah, while they battered at the gates, supposing that he had slain Khaled. But he himself could not at first distinguish whether they were angry or glad.

"If any man wishes to take my life," he cried, "let him come and take it."

And the sword they all knew in battle, began to make a storm of lightning about his head in the morning sun.

Then the strong man who had wrestled and thrown the other before dawn, stood out alone and spoke in a loud voice.

"We will have no Sultan but Khaled!" he cried. "Give us Abdullah that we may make trappings for our camels from his skin."

Then Khaled sheathed his sword and came forward from under the gate, and Zehowah stood veiled beside him.

"Where is this Abdullah?" he asked. "Find him if you can, for I would like to speak with him."

Then there was silence for a space. But by this time Abdullah's men had fled, for they had already been forced back in the crowding, and so soon as they saw Khaled standing unhurt under the palace gate, they turned quickly and ran for their lives to escape from the city, seeing that all was lost.

"Where is Abdullah?" Khaled asked again.

And a voice from afar off answered, as though heralding the coming of a great personage.

"Behold Abdullah, the Sultan of Nejed!" it cried.

Then the multitude turned angrily, grasping swords

and spears and breathing curses. But the murmur broke suddenly into a shout of laughter louder even than the cry of Khaled had been. For a great procession had entered the square and the people made way for it as it advanced towards the palace.

First came a score of lepers, singing in hideous voices and dancing in the early sun, filthy and loathsome to behold. And then came all manner of cripples, laughing and chattering, with coloured rags fastened to their staves, an army of distorted apes.

Then, walking alone and feeling his way with his staff came the Sheikh of the beggars. And in one hand he held the end of a halter, which was fastened about Abdullah's head and neck and between his teeth, so that he could not cry out. And the blind man chanted a kasid which he had composed in the night in honour of Abdullah ibn Mohammed el Herir, the victorious Sultan of Nejed.

"Upon whom may Allah send much boiling water," sang the Sheikh of the beggars after each stave.

And Abdullah, his head and face shaven as bald as an ostrich's egg, was bent by the weight he carried, for upon his shoulders rode the cripple whom they called the Ass of Egypt, clapping the wooden shoes he used on his hands, like cymbals to accompany the song of the blind man. And last of all came a veiled woman, walking sadly, for she could not escape, being surrounded and driven on by many scores of beggars, all dancing and shouting and crying out mock praises of the Sultan Abdullah and his wife.

But as the procession moved on the laughter increased a hundredfold, until all men's eyes were blind with mirth, and their breasts were bursting and aching with so much merriment.

At last the Sheikh of the beggars stood before Khaled holding the halter. And here he made a deep obeisance, pulling the halter so that Abdullah nearly fell to the ground.

"In the name of the beggars," he said, "I present to your high majesty the sultan of Nejed, Abdullah ibn Mohammed, and his chief minister the Ass of Egypt, and moreover the sultan's wife. May it please your high majesty to reward the beggars with a few small coins and a little barley, for having brought his high majesty, the new sultan, safely to the gate of the palace and to the steps of the throne."

Thereupon all the beggars, the lepers, the cripples, the blind men and those of weak understanding fell down together at Khaled's feet.

This is the story of Khaled the believing genius, which he caused to be written down in letters of gold by the most accomplished scribe in Nejed, that all men might remember it. But of what afterwards occurred there is nothing told in the scribe's manuscript. It is recounted, however, in the commentaries of one Abd ul Latif that Khaled did not cause Abdullah to be beheaded, nor in any way hurt, save that he was driven out of the city with his wife, where certain Bedouins affirmed that he lived for many years with

her in great destitution. But it is well known that after this Zehowah bore Khaled many strong sons, whose children and children's children reigned gloriously for many generations in Nejed. And Khaled and Zehowah died full of years on the same day, and lie buried together in a garden without the Hasa gate, and the pilgrims from Ajman and the east visit their tombs even to the present time.

THE END

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